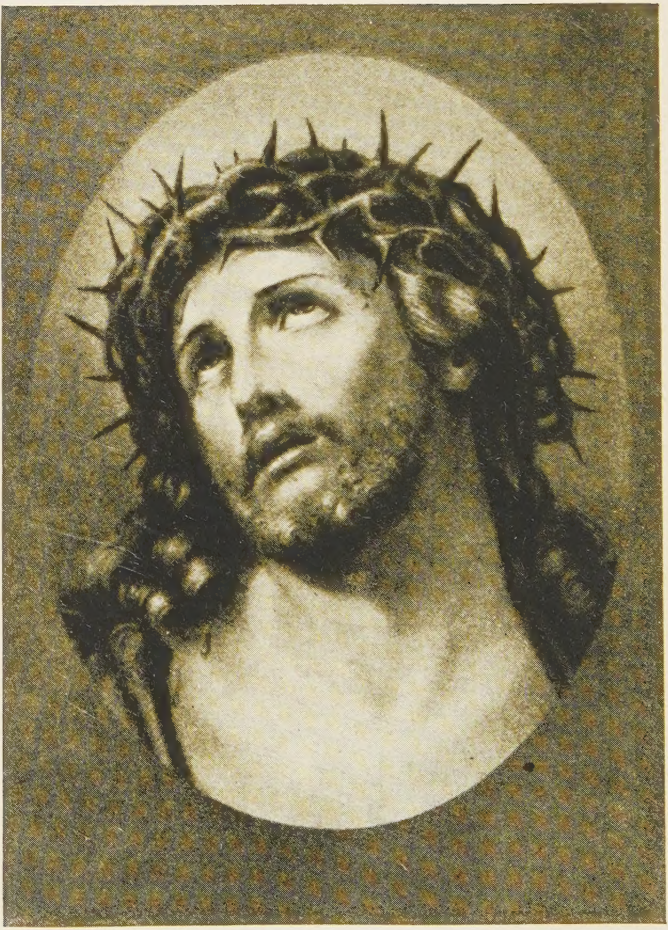
THE MOUNTAINS OF MYRRH



The Mountains of Myrrh

REFLECTIONS ON THE SACRED PASSION

BY THE

REV. JOHN H. O'ROURKE, S.J.

Author of "Under the Sanctuary Lamp,"
"The Fountains of the Saviour"
"On the Hills with Our Lord"
"On Israel's Hills"
"Journeys with Our Lord"

Fifth Thousand

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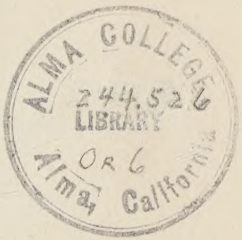

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To

Mr. and Mrs. FRANCIS P. GARVAN

Whose wonderful kindness
during a long and painful illness
will never be forgotten
as it can never be repaid
This little volume is gratefully dedicated.

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PREFACE

These pages, treating in a simple meditative manner of the sufferings of our Blessed Saviour, have already appeared in *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart.* They are now published in permanent form with the hope of increasing a love for the Sacred Passion. Spiritual writers tell us that the ordinary food of the fervent soul is a devotion to our Lord's sufferings; while the author of "The Following of Christ" says that there are more lovers of our Lord in His glory on Mount Thabor than in His agony and humiliation on Mount Calvary. In any case we can rest assured that in moments of pain and anguish,—and truly there are many such in all lives,—nothing can be more helpful, nothing more consoling, than to know and remember that our Blessed Master endured pain and sorrow for our sake; and that pain and sorrow bravely and patiently borne make us more and more like unto Him.

My sincere thanks are due to my dear friends, Father Joseph H. Smith, S. J., and Father John Corbett, S. J., who revised these pages and saw them through the press.

JOHN H. O'ROURKE, S. J.

Feast of the Seven Sorrows, 1921
Kohlmann Hall, N. Y.

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FROM THE CENACLE TO OLIVET

EVERY least detail of the Law having been carried out by our Blessed Saviour at the Last Supper, He washed the feet of His Disciples, lingering no doubt lovingly and sorrowfully over those of Judas; and, mindful of the promise made by the Lakeshore, He instituted the Sacrament of love. When every sacred rite was over, "a hymn being said they went forth unto the mount of Olives." When the tones of that sublime act of thanskgiving had died upon their lips they walked out into the moonlit road, and our Saviour began His journey of sorrow which before set of sun on the next day was to end with the shedding of His Blood on Mount Calvary. There are some commentators who think that the prophetic warnings of our Lord that night were uttered on this journey from the Cenacle to Gethsemani, but St. Luke seems to place these events before the departure from the supper chamber.

The evening is cold and chilly, as it usually is in March in Jerusalem even after a

comparatively warm and dry day. The Paschal moon in all its fulness is lighting the narrow streets through which they are silently passing on towards the city wall. As the Temple gates will be opened at midnight, the people are already astir preparing for the festival. Our Lord and His Apostles, moving rapidly through the streets, can perhaps see the lights flickering in the porches and colonnades of the Temple, and hear the tramp of moving feet, which doubtless the Apostles attribute to the gathering of the early worshippers, the while our Blessed Saviour Himself knows that it is His enemies who, it may be under the leadership of Judas, are getting ready with the soldiers to go to the Garden and apprehend Him.

Their way stretched most probably through Ophel, which lies south of the Temple, and out through the gate in the southeastern angle of the wall into the valley of Josaphat. This is the last time our Blessed Saviour will pass through the Sacred City, the city He loved so well and over which but a few days previously He wept, a free Man. When He enters it again, His hour will have come and He will be a prisoner in the hands of His bitter enemies. Willingly He is going to meet those who are

thirsting for His death, traveling over the same road by which David hurried away from his ungrateful son, Absalom, anxious for his father's throne and his father's life. Where our Lord and His Apostles are passing David sent Sadoc back with the Ark saying: "Carry back the Ark of God into the city; if I find grace in the sight of the Lord, He will bring me again, and He will show me it and His tabernacle." Only an hour ago our Blessed Saviour had given His Body and His Blood to His Apostles, and they, together with their successors, were for all time to keep that Blessed Food in the Tabernacle for the strengthening of the children of men. This gift was His last gift of love, His final testimony of affection before going forth to die at the ninth hour on the morrow.

Shortly after nine o'clock our Lord and His Apostles are probably walking silently in the shadow of the great city wall towards the garden. It is not easy to imagine what must have been the feelings of His loved ones, accompanying their Master at that hour of the night. The stillness which hung over the valley even at the short distance from the city, the dark shadows of the high wall flung out over the ravine and the dried brook, the

stunted vegetation, the light making its way through the branches and moving leaves of the olive trees, the calmness and almost unnatural silence which reigned about them, broken only by the stumbling of their own footsteps, all these circumstances must have deeply affected the spirits of the simple Galileans.

There had that night been a solemnity about the Master such as they had never witnessed before. His words and His mysteries had touched the deepest depths of their affection, and so they followed Him anxiously and with a feeling of awe as He walked with bowed head and broken heart to the first sad scene of the morrow's tragedy. About one hundred and fifty feet from the garden our Lord turned and addressed His Apostles, as the Scripture tells us. He said to them: "Sit you here till I go yonder and pray." These words were spoken to eight of the eleven who were with Him; for from what follows it is clear that Peter, James and John accompanied the Master into the garden, for we read in St. Mark: "And He taketh Peter, James and John with Him."

"Pray, lest you enter into temptation," He gently and lovingly warned them all, as with

His chosen three He separated from the rest. Sadly did they need to pray at that hour for the shadows of a great storm were fast thickening about them. They were that night to be tested to the breaking point. His words of warning spoken so shortly before must have been still ringing in their ears: "You will all be scandalized in My regard this night; for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep shall be dispersed.'" They were astonished indeed at the suggestion of any unfaithfulness on their part, and rejected the thought of even the possibility of their deserting Him. Peter, who was to prove the weakest, was loudest and most emphatic in his protests of steadfast and sincere loyalty.

Our Lord, however, had listened in mournful silence to their protests and their vows. But now on parting from them for the struggle which was to begin, for the battle He was soon to fight, His love dictated a renewal of the warning. Possibly the sounds which reached Him from the city, and the moving lights in the Temple porches suggested the injunction, "Pray lest you enter into temptation." This same command was to be given later to the sleeping three when they were visited during the long hours of the agony under the olive

trees in Gethsemani. The warning was to go unheeded, the suggestion of prayer necessary for their steadfastness was to be neglected, and so when the hour of trial came they were found wanting. When the time for loyalty arrived, they turned their backs upon Him and fled from Him in fear of His enemies. Those who a few hours before had protested that they would be true to Him, that no danger would shake their constancy, no temptation weaken their allegiance, these few men abandoned Him and left Him in the hands of those who were seeking His life. They had neglected to pray, and their poor weak wills gave way shamefully in the moment when they were put to the test.

How different would be the story of our spiritual lives, if there were more prayer in them! The life of the soul without prayer is like the life of the body without food. The body without nourishment gradually grows weak and finally dies of starvation. So the soul without its spiritual nutriment grows inert, listless, frail, and if temptation comes spiritual death results. If our higher aims become blurred, if nobler motives no longer stir us to brave deeds, if the spiritual vision of other days becomes clouded and our wills

feeble, if the relish for divine things grows poor, if meditation is distasteful and neglected and our attractions to the low and gross things of earth become more alluring, and our whole spiritual fibre seems to relax and we are dull to lofty motives and to Heavenly impulses, we shall find that the reason is because prayer and union with God are slipping out of our lives.

To use the figure of Holy Writ, the land of our spirit is becoming desolate because we do not think in our hearts, because we do not from time to time kneel before the Tabernacle strengthening our spiritual vision and energizing our enfeebled wills by dwelling in prayer on those spiritual principles and truths which are the food and nourishment of the soul, and are seen so clearly and realized so vividly under the light of the sanctuary lamp. As well try to see on a dark night without a light, as well try to run our trolleys without the current speeding through the wires, as well try to breathe and keep life in the body without oxygen as to lead a prayerless spiritual life. A prayerless spiritual life is a contradiction in terms.

Prayer is needed not only to keep our souls alive but also to help us to cope with the obstacles which daily confront us and to with-

stand our enemies both within and without. Our inclinations gravitate to that which is low. Our vision is short-sighted, our wills are weak, the world and its attractions are dazzling and fascinating. What hope then will there be in hours of temptation, unless we prepare ourselves for the struggle by fortifying ourselves by fervent, habitual prayer! We read much nowadays about preparedness because of possible dangers which many imagine are not far distant, but no preparation against a foreign foe can be as necessary as the preparation which the soul must make against the temptations that continually confront it. Small wonder then, that our Blessed Saviour realizing so vividly the approach of His enemies, and knowing full well the timidity of His simple followers in the presence of Priests and Pharisees, small wonder then, I say, that He bade them pray.

Had they followed the wishes of His loving and sorrowing Heart how different had been the story of that sad night! How different, too, the story of the dead years of our lives had we heeded this same teaching of our Lord, and had we in the past prepared by fervent prayer against the temptations that assailed us! As it has been in the past, so shall it be

in the future. If our days are empty, giddy, worldly, selfish and comfort-seeking, with more thought of frivolity than of faith, if we are more frequent at the theatre than at the altar, more concerned about the society of the world than about the society of the Saints, more solicitous about politics and even graft than about sanctifying grace and prayer, then we can expect that in the hour of temptation we shall show ourselves selfish cowards and turn our backs upon the Master who died for us.

"AND taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad." The companions who saw our Lord raise Jairus's daughter from her bed of death, and who were the spectators of His glory on Thabor were admitted more fully into the secrets of this awful night of sorrow. As they had seen Him in all the beauty of His transfigured glory on the mountain where "His Face did shine as the sun," so now they were to be witnesses of His defeat in all the shame of His agony, when His Face was red with drops of the Precious Blood.

Our Blessed Saviour knew that His hour was come, and from that moment when in the Garden He allowed His three loving companions but the faintest glimpse at the dark shadows of sorrow that hung over His Heart by telling them "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," till the expiring cry on Mount Calvary died away on the darkened air, the chalice of suffering, pain and humiliation was pressed to His lips till the very dregs had been drained to the last drop. Having hinted at the storm of sorrow which was sweeping over

His soul, He bade them tarry where they were and pray. Then "going a little further He fell flat upon His Face, saying 'My Father, if it be possible let this chalice pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt."

No wonder our Lord fell upon the earth and prayed. At the ninth hour on the morrow there was to be consummated on the cross the crucifixion of His body, but under the olive trees crying piteously "Abba Father" there began the still more painful crucifixion of His soul. He had to face alone in the shadows and the darkness of the Garden the deepest desolation that ever swept over human spirit, the bitterest sorrow that ever flooded a human soul, the keenest grief that ever racked with paroxysms of pain a human life. All this He had to endure alone, and the shadows and darkness were the only witnesses of His overwhelming agony and humiliation. There was one, only one, who could console Him, His own sweet, pure Mother; but she is not with Him under the olive trees, but views with tear-stained eyes the scene in vision in the undisturbed quiet of the silent supper chamber. This battle He must fight alone. Only once in the history of the world has that cry of anguish, "My

Father, if it be possible let this chalice pass from me," been forced from human lips and remained unheard, and He who uttered it was God's beloved Son, flat upon His face under Gethsemani's olive trees, on the last night of His life.

Who can tell the sufferings of the Sacred Heart in His agony? No angelic mind can sound its depths, no pen or word of seer or prophet can describe its intensity and bitterness. His "soul was sorrowful, even unto death." We have witnessed sorrows in the lives of those we have loved. Gladly we would have shed the tears and endured the anguish, but there has never been a sorrow like that of the divine Sufferer on Holy Thursday night in the Garden. We have stood over the open graves of dear ones, and have heard the clay falling so cruelly upon their coffins and we thought our hearts would break, and we felt that our grief was deep and that it bit sharply into our souls; but that grief did not kill, its sharp edge gradually wore away, the sighs grew softer and less frequent on our lips and the unbidden tears dried upon our cheeks; but the sorrow, the fear and the heaviness which that night hung over the strong, gentle soul of our Blessed

Saviour were freighted with cruel murder. They came and struck His spirit blows which naturally ought to have laid that sacred body lifeless at the foot of Mount Olivet. Think of Him who was eternal life, who was from the everlasting years, on the brink of the grave, conquered by death in His agony, had not the Father stayed the malignant power of His enemy till the ninth hour of the morrow on the cross.

Although there was enough of agony and suffering and grief flooding His soul and inundating His spirit, to steal away His precious life before He laid it down of His own accord on Good Friday, yet the arm of the evil one was held and he could not strike the death blow; our Blessed Saviour lived on to suffer and to die at the appointed moment. Mary was not childless that night. The Babe of Bethlehem, her beauteous Boy, her love, had yet another day of life. Before the set of sun on the next day He would be dead, bruised and mangled and killed, not by the cruel lashes and the nails but by the sorrow that was sweeping over Him as He whispered to His poor tired Apostles, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death."

Were His sorrows so great that night that

death would have been a relief? Was He so exhausted from the emotions which had rushed in upon His spirit that like a tired child falling to sleep He fain would have bowed His head upon the green sward and given His spirit into the keeping of His Father? Would death have been sweet to that weary body and silent spirit? Possibly that sorrow-drenched soul yearned for the relief of death on that dreadful night. The tired eyes would not close, the blood-stained lips would not be dumb, the weary hands would not be quiet. No death could come till that sacred body had been racked with ten thousand pains and that spirit had been crushed with shame and the chalice of suffering had been drained to its lowest and bitterest dregs on Golgotha's height.

As He knelt in prayer "He began to fear and to grow heavy." Emotions of fear with all its alarms and shadows, desolation with all its disquiet and weariness took possession of His sorrowing soul. When he viewed the raging waves of the Lake and heard the shrieking of its angry winds and the tossing of its foam-fretted billows, at His word the waves fell, the sea was calm, the winds became hushed and silent as the quiet of a

sleeping forest on a still, calm night. Now when a storm wilder than had ever raged on Genesareth's water swept over His spirit, no word of His was spoken to calm the angry billows that rolled in quick succession and cruelly buffeted His tormented soul. But why the fear, why the desolation? It must have been the dark, repulsive vision of sin which frightened and depressed our Blessed Saviour. He was the innocent, meek Lamb of God. His stainless human nature had never been touched by the blight of original sin. Actual sin could not taint that soul, purer than the driven snow on uncharted mountains, whiter than unsullied foam cresting the waves of the salt tropical sea. His spotless purity is beyond all words, beyond all thoughts.

The sanctity of angelic hosts and the unspeakable holiness of His own sweet Mother are but a blemish compared to the holiness of the soul of our Blessed Saviour. He the Man-God, the source of all sanctity, trembling in an agony of fear and depression at the sight of sin is the fountain and model of all purity and holiness. He was the only one of all the generations of men who in the fullest sense could challenge the world to convict Him of sin. He hates and loathes sin

with an infinite hate and an infinite loathing, yet as He kneels under the olive trees the awful, terrifying vision of sin passes before Him, seizes upon Him with cruel grip and makes Him feel as if He were, what He never could be, a living breathing man of sin. Oh, the horror of the sight!

Glancing back over the dead centuries, He could see as they stood out before His mind as clearly as the waving branches of the olive trees in the moonlight, all the wickedness and transgressions of men. Back to the rebellion of the angels on the battlements of Heaven, and on through the dead years His mind travels. He sees Adam's fall in the Garden and the banishment of our first parents from the earthly paradise. He sees the whole human race, through Adam's failure, infected with the loathsome leprosy of original sin. He watches the growth of wickedness and lust eating into the lives of millions until His Father repents that He has created man. All the foulness and iniquities which brought on the flood rushed by Him that night stinging His innocent spirit like scorpions. The pride and ambition of the wicked builders of Babel's Tower moves by only to be replaced by the revolting vision of the revelry and iniquities

of the cities of the Plain now buried under the salt waters of the Dead Sea.

Under His very eyes the fountains of fire break forth, burning forests crackle, the Jordan and the sea hiss, and vast clouds of hot steam burn the half-naked revellers as they rush in terror in long lines before Him, and He sees with infinite pain their souls dropping into hell. The picture of Baltassar's feast, with its drunkenness and impurity and its desecration of the holy vessels of the Sacred Temple, burns itself into His frightened soul. The sacrilege of that hideous night reminds Him of the terrible sacrilege of the morrow, and of the sacrileges that will stain the succeeding centuries by the neglect and profanation of His Most Precious Blood. The hardness of heart of the children of Israel, and their stubbornness and ingratitude and sin in the desert for forty years, hang over His Soul more clearly than the Paschal moon hangs in the sky that quiet night over the ill-fated Jerusalem. The sins of all mankind, not only in the past in all their number, kind and malice, but the awful sin of the morrow, and the uncounted sins of every yet unborn age that is to live till the end of time, are pressed down upon His bent shoulders and

made His own as He lies trembling with fear on the blood-stained grass.

He is drenched and saturated with crime. On Him have been laid the iniquities of us all. He recoils with horror from the impure sights before His eyes, the wild shouts of sin resound in His ears, its foul taste is upon His lips, its deadly touch is upon His Sacred Person. There is sin in His eyes, on His lips, on His hand. There is sin upon His garments. He is pressed down and overwhelmed with the vision of sin till He feels as if He were, what He never could be, one great loathsome sin under the anger of an all holy, infinite God. An angry Father, insatiable of reparation, stands over the victim of men's sins and claims full restitution. Infinite sanctity and God's justice exact the completest satisfaction. There is no time now for mercy, it is the moment of justice.

Our Saviour looked toward the morrow and drew back with trembling and fear. Before the moon sets behind Juda's hills He will be drenched with pain and humiliation, a faithless disciple will have imprinted a hypocritical traitor's kiss upon His blood-stained lips. Before unjust, jealous and cruel tribunals He will be hauled and treated with scorn and

contempt. Betrayed, forsaken, bound; He will be hurried before Annas Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod and back again to Pilate. From insult to insult, from court to court, without respite, unrefreshed by food or sleep, His Sacred Flesh torn and mangled by whips and scourges, His Face crimsoned by blood-stains from the thorny crown, He will totter and fall in the sight of His Blessed Mother on the way to Calvary. Nailed to the cross amid the triumphant hootings of His enemies He will be left to die a death of shame. He knew that there was no capability of pain and shame which was not quickened and intensified by crucifixion. He knew that death by crucifixion gathers up into itself and deepens every agony that man can inflict and man endure. No wonder then that He shrank back and trembled with fear at the thought of the shame, the burning thirst, the dizziness, the racking torture, no wonder that He trembled in every limb at the vision of the morrow's holocaust; and on down into the yet unrolled scroll of the centuries He peered, and saw so much that told Him His sacrifice would be in vain, His love unrequited. Can we marvel then that "He began to fear and to grow heavy"?

THE STRUGGLE IN THE DARKNESS

OUR Lord, having said to His Apostles, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," reluctantly withdrew from the sustaining comfort of their presence, and falling "flat on the ground He prayed." Possibly He passed from the full moonlight into the deep shadows under the olive trees, and for a time His anxious companions could but dimly see Him lying quietly upon the cold, damp earth, at times rising upon His knees with arms outstretched in supplication, the silence broken ever and anon by snatches of His prayer as He pleaded, oh so piteously, that the chalice might pass from Him.

With what emotions His loved ones must have watched that agony, that awful death struggle! Only a few months ago they had seen His face on Thabor's heights shining like the sun, and now that Sacred Face is covered with tears and blood. They had seen Him in all the glory of His triumph on the mountain of Galilee, and now they are witnesses of all the shame and bitterness of His weakness and defeat. Under these strong

emotions and exhausted by the tender feelings evoked in the supper chamber, it is not surprising that sleep crept over the weary and sorrowful Apostles in spite of their sympathy with their suffering Master; and so they saw perhaps only the early stages of the agony and heard only the first words of His prayer.

On during the long hours He prayed alone. In the darkness He cried out: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee, remove this chalice from Me; but not what I will, but what Thou wilt." How terrible this prayer if He who said, alluding to this hour, "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished," must now beg the Father to take the chalice from His blood-stained lips! Possibly the chalice, for the removal of which He pleaded, was that His Blood would not be shed till the morrow at the ninth hour, and He was piteously imploring His Father to hasten the time of the great sacrifice when the last drop of His Blood would be poured out from His Sacred Heart.

Had He not said to Judas: "What thou dost, do quickly"? May we not think that the Father to some extent at least granted the request of His loving Son, that the Father

could not resist the cry of anguish from those loved lips, and so to satisfy His yearning for the pains and humiliations of the morrow He allowed the Blood to burst through the pores of that Sacred Body, and, saturating His garments, to dye red the olive leaves and green grass upon which He knelt?

Arising he stumbled out from the shadows and sought His Apostles, sought them not once but thrice during this awful period of suspense. Only a short while ago He had said to them: "Stay you here and watch with Me." It ought not to have been difficult for them to have watched with Him. A mother will watch through the long night over her sick child. A friend will keep guard at the bedside of a sick and sleepless friend who is wearily waiting for the dawn; but under the olive trees the loved Master watched alone, forsaken and crushed under the weight of the Father's anger. "I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort Me and I found none." Yet our Blessed Saviour did not complain, He seems rather to have excused them. "The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." Overcome by the emotions to which they were submitted, emotions of fear,

sympathy, weariness and grief, they were "sleeping for sorrow."

If His disciples failed Him His Heavenly Father was not unmindful of His Beloved Son; and so, when once more He was in His agony "there appeared to Him an angel from Heaven strengthening Him." In the desert after His forty days of fast and when the evil one had tempted Him "angels came and ministered to Him." Now as the terrible darkness thickens over His soul and all the horrors of that hideous night crowd in upon Him in torturing forms, God's angel comes to comfort Him. What motives the angelic messenger put before our Lord we know not, but we do know that He redoubled His prayer, for St. Luke tells us "there appeared an angel from Heaven strengthening Him; and being in an agony, He prayed the longer and His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground."

Comfort and consolation in the spiritual life are often the forerunners of a time of spiritual darkness and combat. God thus prepares us for the battle which is to come, for the sifting and the trials that are in store for us; so the angel not by lessening what our Lord is enduring, but by suggesting certain motives,

strengthened Him in His efforts against the over-powering emotions of His spirit. The angel's visit brought courage to our Blessed Saviour and consoled Him, as Ven. Bede says, "by pointing out the greatness of the future fruit not by any lessening of the anguish of His present pain." This view, too, Holy Writ confirms as St. Luke adds: "And being in an agony He prayed the longer."

What an example for us! We are so often reluctant to pray. It is so hard at times to bend the knee and to remain quietly under the sanctuary lamp. Our relish for divine things is so often weak, for earthly attractions frequently so strong. In darkness and desolation our practice of prayer and other exercises of piety are either sluggishly performed or omitted to our spiritual harm, and at times to our undoing. It is at moments such as these when we are reluctant to pray that we must force ourselves to our knees in spirit with our Blessed Saviour under the olive trees, and remember that "being in an agony He prayed the longer." It is in the din and dust of battle that bravery and loyalty are tested. In the spiritual life our love is best manifested when nature cries out against our nobler endeavors, and the heavens seem closed to our pleadings.

At these times when all is dark round about us, let us continue to kneel near the altar beside our suffering Master, and console Him by our efforts to pray the longer, even though desolation and dryness of spirit envelop our souls.

The struggle continues in the silent Garden, His Apostles sleeping in the distance unconscious of our Blessed Saviour's sufferings. St. Luke tells us: "And His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down on the ground." The long hours of the agony are drawing to a close. The burden of the world's sin is pressing heavily on His Sacred Heart. The chalice is being forced close to His lips. Possibly He could see the flickering torches along the eastern wall of the city, and hear the footsteps of His enemies approaching His sacred retreat.

The climax of His night of horrors was reached as writhing in agony He fell upon His face, and His garments were damp and crimson, "and His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down on the ground," reddening the green olive leaves upon which He lay. The Sacred Heart was eager to shed that Blood for love of us that night. Every drop of it was to be poured out on Mount Calvary on the morrow. Thirty-three years ago it was

shed for the first time by the knife eight days after His birth in the cave at Bethlehem. Through all the intervening years that Blood was impatient to be poured forth. It reddened His cheeks and His lips when Mary kissed them in Egypt and Nazareth, and now in the quiet stillness of the Garden it leaped forth before its time, a messenger from the suffering Heart of His pardon for the souls of men.

Years ago the doorposts of the homes of Israel's children in Egypt were marked by the blood of the Paschal lamb, and all was quiet that night through the valley of the Nile, for that blood saved the exiled Israelites from the sword of God's destroying angel. In the quiet of Gethsemani while the sacrifices were being prepared in the Temple, the Precious Blood flowed in anticipation of that fuller shedding of the morrow which will have to mark our souls, if we are to be free and partake of the merits of that Precious Blood and death. This can best be done not by literally pouring out our blood and laying down our lives for Christ; for this is a grace and privilege deigned to a chosen few; but by walking in His Blood-stained footsteps from the Garden to Golgotha. We are not to be delicate

members of a thorn-crowned King, for as St. Paul says: "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscences."

THE TREACHERY

THE long hours of the painful agony were drawing to a close. Three times the evil one on another occasion had approached our Lord with his suggestions in the desert in the days of His fasting, and three times now on the last night of His life our Blessed Saviour drew near to His loved Apostles only to be disappointed by finding them asleep; each time He returned to the quiet shade under the olive trees to commune with His Father and to battle with His desolation and His sorrow. At length the conflict was over, the battle won, and the Son of God came forth triumphant to meet His enemies. To His sleeping Apostles He said: "Sleep ye now and take your rest. It is enough: the hour is come: behold, the Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of sinners."

Possibly our Lord's approach in the deep silence and quiet of the Garden awoke His weary disciples, and in sympathy with their fatigue He bade them sleep and rest before the terrible scenes of His betrayal, so soon to be enacted, began. Once that tragedy opened

there would be little rest for those loved but weak friends. After a short interval, during which our Lord continued His prayer near His Apostles, He bade them arise and accompany Him. At once they approached and joined the other Apostles where they had parted from them on entering the Garden earlier in the evening. But His "hour had come." During the "one hour" when His loved ones slept others had not been idle.

His friends rested from weariness, but Priests and Pharisees were unwearied in their plottings. Peter, who had boasted in the supper chamber of his bravery, had succumbed to the weakness of nature, though the spirit was willing; but Judas had been energetic and zealous in his plots and intrigues. No sleep or fatigue had closed his eyes, no inactivity had quieted his efforts, cooled his ardor or slackened his zeal. He had been wakeful and about his treacherous work through the long hours of the Apostles' rest and the Master's prayer.

In the distance, along the eastern wall of the city, the thoroughly aroused Apostles, now probably apprehensive of danger, could see the lights of the flickering torches, and hear the tramp of the approaching multitude. The

bright moonlight and the glare of the lanterns showed that Judas had betrayed the place of His Master's retirement. To His startled companions our Lord, calm of manner and gentle of tone, said: "Behold, he is at hand who will betray Me." The succession of events is pictured to us in the Gospel of St. John who tells us: "Judas therefore having received a band of soldiers and from the chief Priests and the Pharisees servants, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons." These men seem to have been placed at the disposal of the traitor by the Roman authorities and by the Priests of the Temple, so that Judas could safely secure their much coveted prize.

The hatred and envy of our Lord's enemies had reached its height. On other occasions they had sought His life and failed. Even in the Temple porch they had endeavored not long ago to stone Him to death, and He escaped from their hands, but now nothing must frustrate their designs. There must be now, so near the festival, no failing of their plans, no miscarriage, they say, of justice against this traducer. Judas was the leader of the multitude for St. Luke says: "Behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the Twelve, went before them." The greed

for gold, which was the faithless Apostle's sin, had steadily done its work in his soul and was at length about to triumph.

Only a few hours ago the Master had washed Judas's feet and pleaded for his soul. The treacherous disciple had witnessed the deepest mysteries and heard words of more tender affection than had ever fallen from human lips; but mysteries of love and words of melting compassion could never soften that sinful soul, blinded and hardened by the abuse of grace and the avaricious craving for money. Only a few hours ago he went forth from the supper chamber to carry out his dark deed of betrayal and blood, upon which he had agreed with the enemies of Christ, and now at the head of a multitude he is on the point of fulfilling his sacrilegious compact by conducting them to the place of our Lord's retirement so that they may lay unholy hands upon Him and lead Him a captive to His death. Possibly he at first brought the rabble to the supper chamber in search of their Sacred Victim. It was in that sacred spot that Judas had looked for the last time upon our Lord's countenance when he went forth upon his errand of treachery. Disappointed in not finding their enemy in the Cenacle they were

at once led across the city by the faithless disciple, who perhaps on that journey agreed with them upon the signal of recognition. They must not make a mistake in this supreme moment, he warned them, and seize one of the Apostles, instead of the Master. The Garden would be dimly lit by the Paschal moon, and they were to be sure and capture the one whom he would mark with a kiss.

How unutterable the woe of our Blessed Lady as perhaps she listens to the receding footsteps of the mob! Had she herself answered the inquiry of Judas at her door? Had she with her own lips told him that Jesus had left the supper chamber some hours before? How she longed to go and warn her Son of His danger! When His life was in peril thirty-three years ago from the cruel sword of Herod she had carried Him in her frightened arms through the hill-country and out over the desert into Egypt, but in this dark hour of sorrow and dismay like her Son she must fight the battle alone. No soul can ever know the waves of pain and grief and desolation which that night surged about her pure heart during those anxious hours, and beat against her gentle but strong spirit, threatening to engulf her.

"As He was yet speaking behold a multitude and he that was called Judas, one of the Twelve, went before them." It is not hard to picture the scene. Our Lord surrounded by His anxious and timid Apostles stood at the entrance of the Garden, watching the approaching rabble. He knew in advance each least detail of that sacrilegious tragedy, and calmly and sorrowfully awaited its development. His companions were stunned and filled with fear; yet for the present they clung to their Master, and Peter even showed some signs of courage. "And he that betrayed Him gave them a sign saying: 'Whomsoever I shall kiss that is He; lay hold on Him and lead Him away carefully.'"

As the multitude neared the Garden our Saviour advanced to meet them. Judas led the way and set the pace for His enemies, and approaching His Master, said: "Hail, Rabbi," so as to be heard by his wicked followers, and "he kissed Him." The unhappy man had fulfilled his promise to the Priests and the Pharisees. He had carried out his contract to the letter. He had given them a sign, and that sign was the staining of his own lips with the Sacred Blood which in a few hours would be shed for his salvation. Centuries before,

Holy Writ had graphically described the blackness of this ingratitude and the bitterness of our Lord's sorrows. "There is a companion who rejoiceth with his friend in his joys, but in the time of trouble he will be against him. If my enemy had reviled me I would willingly have borne with it; and if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him, but thou my guide and familiar, who didst take sweet meats together with me in the house of God. His words are smoother than oil and the same are darts."

Now for three years Judas had been our Saviour's companion, his familiar. From that ever memorable spring morning when He came down from His night of prayer on the mountain and selected Judas from the seventy-two to be one of the Twelve, and had picked him out to a closer fellowship, the faithless disciple had been the recipient of uncounted graces. On the mountainside and in the valleys and on the Lakeshore he had seen the eyes of the blind opened to the light of day. He had known of the deaf ears that were touched by the Master's hand and heard the music of the water on the sandy shore. He had watched the leper covered with sores

and corruption kneeling as the Master raised His hands and, banishing the fell disease, restored him to health. And now after all these blessings and favors he betrays Him into the hands of His enemies, as Jeremias had said: "With his mouth one speaketh peace with his friend and secretly he lieth in wait for him." By this act of ingratitude he carried out his own pledged word to Priest and Pharisee and became entitled to thirty pieces of silver. For bribery he sold His Master's Blood. For silver he ruined his own soul.

This hideous crime which stung keenly the Sacred Heart and beat into our Lord's soul was no sudden burst of passion. Judas did not bring himself to betray his Master in a day or a week. That crime was a gradual growth. Little by little avarice grew stronger and stronger in his heart. Gradually it held him tighter till at last gripping him like a vise there was no power in Judas's soul to break away. The love for money blinded him to all else, and when he saw the hatred of our Lord's enemies and their determination to have His life, the temptation to come into the plans and schemes of the Priests for what he thought would be a rich reward, overcame him. The money, dangling before his avari-

cious soul, destroyed his gradually weakening allegiance to the Master and swept him to his ruin. So it is with every human passion; if its beginning is neglected it grows stronger in the heart and takes deeper root, and if we are not upon our guard the day can come when there will be no power in the human will to pluck it out; it will push its roots deeper until it, too, leads us away from our allegiance to Christ and drags us to our irreparable ruin.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

JUDAS had with treacherous kiss betrayed his Master. When all the loving memories and tender associations of three years of companionship had been killed by avarice, then, with deep-dyed hypocrisy he profaned with sacrilegious kiss the sacred lips of his Friend, the Man-God. This base deed had been prefigured in the Old Testament; for we read in the Book of Kings: "And Joab said to Amasa: 'God save thee, my brother.' And he took Amasa by the chin with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not take notice of the sword which Joab had and he struck him in the side and shed out his bowels to the ground, and gave him not a second wound and he died." This deed of blood is slight in heinousness compared with the wickedness of the faithless disciple's treachery. Who can tell with what feeling akin to despair Judas must have slunk back to safety amid his companions? We shall see him no more till we follow his faltering footsteps as he steals crouchingly along the eastern wall down to his death of self-destruction in the valley of Hinnom.

Turning aside then from the traitor and addressing the multitude our Lord said to them: "Whom seek ye?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Then Jesus said to them: "I am He." "And Judas also, who betrayed him, stayed with them. As soon therefore as He had said to them, 'I am He,' they went backward and fell to the ground." These words, which revealed beyond a doubt our Lord's identity to His enemies, were uttered to save His Apostles, for St. John tells us that our Lord added: "If therefore you seek Me, let these go their way."

Not so long ago many of His enemies who were present now, had heard Him announce from the Temple steps, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd giveth His life for His sheep." His hour had at last come, but the Apostles were to live on, and had a work to do. They were to gather in gladness the harvest that the Master begins tonight to sow in humiliation, in tears and blood. Their work is not done, their hour has not yet come. Many long years of suffering await them, before they will be called to seal with their blood the teaching for which their Master was to die on the morrow. In His parting prayer only a few hours ago in the Cenacle He had

said to His Father: "Those whom Thou gavest Me have I kept; and none of them is lost but the son of perdition."

"Jesus of Nazareth" was the answer which was given to His question as to the object of their search. Then with infinite calmness and majesty our Lord replied: "I am He." This answer must have been wholly unexpected, otherwise why had they been accompanied by Roman soldiers, why armed with swords and clubs? Doubtless they had anticipated either compromise, flight or resistance. They had tried to apprehend Him not long ago in the Temple porches and had taken up stones to cast at Him .They had endeavored to fling Him over the brow of the hill at Galilee, but He had always foiled their best laid plans, escaped their crafty and sudden attacks. They thought probably that on this occasion, too, He would again slip from their grasp.

When our Lord, therefore, with a Heavenly light upon His countenance, with peace and gentleness upon His lips, stood there before them in all the majesty of His innocence, and in a voice untouched by fear or passion revealed His identity, "they went backward and fell to the ground." That voice now so gentle had bidden the wild waves of Genesareth's

waters to calm, and at its command they were stilled. It had ordered the winds to hush, and they were at once made silent. "Be thou made clean," it had told the leper, and the foul disease of festering limb and fevered frame had vanished. One day in Decapolis to a man who was deaf and dumb that voice had said, "Ephpheta, that is, 'Be opened,' and immediately his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed and he spoke right." Only a few weeks ago two blind men at Jericho's gate pleaded for light, pleaded that their sightless eyes might see. Then that sweet voice of power said: "Go your way, your faith hath made you whole," and they received sight and followed Him in the way. So now at the sound of this voice His enemies, those who had come out to apprehend Him, reel back and fall to the ground, struck by its awful power.

What a joy it would have been to the Sacred Heart of our Blessed Saviour if that throng, which had come out in envy and hatred, had thrown themselves prostrate before Him to worship and adore! Whether any were touched by this miracle, we know not. If some for a moment faltered and hesitated we may be certain that the blind Pharisees and

Priests urged them on to the completion of their wicked designs.

"Whom seek ye?" These words which produced in the minds of His enemies a paroxysm of wonder and fear, have a lesson for ourselves. When the holy women came early on Easter morning to anoint the Body of the dead Christ in the tomb an angel told them: "Fear not you, for I know you seek Jesus who was crucified. Why seek you the living among the dead?" Whom do we seek in our aims, our motives, our actions, our plans, our schemes? Are we seeking Jesus who was crucified or are we often seeking ourselves, seeking low aims and ignoble purposes? If so, is it not true that we are seeking the living among the dead? Are we not rather at such times in quest of life among the mouldering bones and grinning skulls of the tomb? Those who look for satisfaction in the cup that cheers, spending their hard-earned wages in drink and neglecting to provide for starving wives and children, surely such as these are not seeking Jesus of Nazareth, but rather they are looking for life where death abides.

Parents who have won worldly success and unaccustomed wealth, ambitious to climb into the membership of those whose forefathers

would not have allowed them into the country if they could have prevented it, aspiring cringingly to the crumbs that fall from the tables of what they call the social set; parents as pitiless as those who send their children to non-Catholic schools, jeopardizing their little ones' souls for society, are not seeking Jesus of Nazareth, they are looking for life in graves and tombs. Fathers whose children hear them curse but never hear them pray; fathers who read the Sunday papers and linger over their suggestive pictures instead of attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; parents who encourage sons and daughters to marry those who are not of their Faith in the hope of some supposed material advancement; men who strive to amass wealth by questionable means and extortionate prices, or by doling out to their workingmen and women starvation wages which cry to Heaven for vengeance, employees who conspire to injure their master's property or goods; politicians who seek their pockets and position rather than the welfare of their country;—all these and others are not seeking Christ, they are looking for life and happiness where there is only death and sorrow.

All life's joys, pleasures, smiles and suc-

cesses sought for themelves by rejecting or neglecting the Church's teachings, what are they in the end? They are siren voices which lead us on, unreal mirages which draw us from the true path, till finally we perish in the desert of passing worldliness and sin. It is not thus that Christ crucified is sought. Such lives are looking for the living among the dead, for life amid grinning skulls which sooner or later will turn and laugh at us for our folly; for what doth it profit to gain the whole world and lose our own soul, or, what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Our Lord, then, once more asking His enemies whom they sought and receiving from them the same answer, bade them allow His Apostles to go. This was the final signal that He was to ask no compromise, offer no resistance and was about to deliver Himself into their hands. Then Peter urged by his usual impetuous generosity, when he saw our Lord's enemies about to lay hands upon his loved Master, "having a sword drew it, and struck the servant of the High Priest and cut off his right ear." Our Lord immediately condemned the ill-timed offence and rebuked His impulsive and angry Apostle, and touching the ear of the servant cured him. Jesus, there-

fore, said to Peter: "Put up thy sword into the scabbard. The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it? All that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot ask My Father, and He will give Me presently more than twelve legions of angels? How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that so it must be done?"

In the agony under the olive trees a short while ago, He had asked that the chalice might pass from Him, but now His hour had come and He will drain that chalice to its last drops. Like a lamb He would be led to the slaughter; He was a victim because He wished. Hence Peter must put back the sword which for a moment flashed in the moonlight in His defense. The thunders and lightning of heaven were His to command for the smiting of His enemies, had He wished. Twelve legions of angels were at His beck to do His bidding, had He made them a sign; but no portents, no wonders, no miracles will be wrought now for His safety or for His freedom. In a few moments He will enter Jerusalem a prisoner, an unarmed, meek outcast, betrayed by a faithless disciple and abandoned by weak Apostles. The Priests of His nation who had not the courage to stretch forth their

hands against Him when He sat daily teaching in the Temple, come forth now from the dark background and insistently urge His capture. Finally, our Lord gives the word, "This is your hour and the power of darkness." These words killed all hope in the hearts of His weak Apostles, " and the disciples all leaving Him fled." Then He was left alone and, surrounded by Roman soldiers, was at last in the hands of His enemies.

A WILLING CAPTIVE

WE may look upon the seizure of our Blessed Saviour as the formal opening and inauguration of His Sacred Passion. St. John describes it in these words: "Then the band and the tribune, and the servants of the Jews took Jesus and bound Him. And they led Him away to Annas first." In the supper chamber a few hours ago the Apostles had boasted that no matter what the danger they would share it with Him and be steadfast in their purpose of clinging to Him. Yet, notwithstanding our Lord's very positive warning and their own protestations, they fell.

How can human nature ever presume after such a fall! They had been granted a vocation next to the Divine Maternity of His own Blessed Mother. Inexhaustible benedictions, and a bewildering amount of love had been bestowed upon them. For three years they had lived in the closest intimacy with their Master. That very night they had been warned in most formal terms, of their defection; but they had protested their own loyalty, and their souls had been stirred by words of

melting tenderness from the lips of our Blessed Saviour. For the first time they had been fed upon the Bread of the strong, His own Body and Blood; and, wonderful honor, they had been ordained priests of the New Law; yet in spite of such signal and incomprehensible favors at the very first approach of danger, not to themselves, at least directly, but to Him, they had turned their backs upon their kind and condescending Master and fled away. While He was in the hands of His enemies they were hiding in the darkness of the caverns and tombs of the Hinnom valley.

How true it ever is and must be that no length of service, no opportunity for close and intimate friendship with Christ, no miracles of grace even, nor any warnings from on High can make us safe unless we fulfil the injunction neglected by the Apostles: "Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation," for "he that loveth danger shall perish in it!"

More painful to our Lord's tender and compassionate Heart must have been the desertion of His loved ones than any savage roughness and ruthless cruelty of the armed multitude that came out to apprehend Him. When our Blessed Saviour said: "It is your

hour and the power of darkness," the leader who commanded the detachment of soldiers and the mob gave the order, and they bound Jesus and led Him away. To this indignity the meek Lamb of God utters no word of remonstrance, makes no resistance for "He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and He shall not open His mouth."

The bright Paschal moon in the sky, and the light from the flaming torches helped the enemies of our Blessed Saviour in their wicked work. His arms which a short while ago were lifted in prayer to the Father in the Garden, and which on the morrow will be outstretched on the cross, are pinioned behind His back, and His wrists bound so tightly by cords that His Blood flows from the wounds. Round His Body ropes are drawn by which He will be pulled through the streets to the house of the High-Priest. Many are the cruel blows and buffets which are rained upon Him. No doubt the Priests spat upon Him as we know they did later, and with hatred born of Satan encouraged the mob to multiply their cruelties and indignities.

"They bound Him." What availed these chains and ropes and cords unless He, Him-

self, wished to be bound! As the cords cut into His Flesh, and the blows were multiplied upon His Sacred Person His Soul was whispering to the Father "Yet more, My Father, yet more." When St. Francis Xavier was shown in a vision the dark future, filled with the deep humiliations and most painful sufferings that were in store for him, and from which human nature drew back in terror and quailed with fear, he gained strength to cry out in a rapture of loving courage: "Yet more, O Lord, yet more," because he had before his mind the sight of the Master bound and buffeted at midnight at the foot of Mount Olivet.

When that other loyal knight, Ignatius, lay hungry and weak, languishing in prison under the weight of his humiliating chains cutting into his limbs, his enemies and accusers taunted him with the severity of his suffering. At once that pale, emaciated face was flushed with almost royal blood from his noble heart, his dark eye flashed fire, his whole countenance beamed with enthusiasm and love, and he cried out pointing to his chains: "You cannot forge in all Salamanca chains enough to satisfy the desire which burns within my soul to suffer for my Master who was bound for me."

Whence this courage, whence this bravery, whence this endurance, whence this loyalty, if not from the sight of his Lord and Master bound for him on Holy Thursday night and led before an unjust tribunal by a wicked Jewish rabble, urged on by cruel and still more wicked Priests?

Mary, His own sweet Mother, bound Him as a Child, when she swathed Him in His little garments and put lovingly upon Him His seamless robe, fashioned by her own deft fingers. Did He think that night as the cords cut into His Sacred Flesh of His Mother's tenderness and reverence at Bethlehem, at Egypt and at Nazareth? How different the binding now of His limbs with the rough cords and ropes from Mary's loving attentions thirty-three years ago! As they bound Him that night no doubt His mind moves forward through the centuries, and He was consoled by the thought of the myriads who would wish to be bound to Him by His Law. He can count the unnumbered multitudes of all tribes and peoples and tongues who will walk faithfully in the way of His Commandments, and will be glad to be bound by His precepts because He chose out of love for us to be tied with cords and ropes by His cruel enemies.

Nature will at times rebel; inclination for a false freedom foreign to the Church of God will urge men to break the ties that bind them to His will; the world will attract, its pleasures allure, its visions dance attractively before dazzled eyes, but the thought that the Master was bound will make them strong and true, firm and faithful. They will look upon the observance of God's Commandments and the laws of His Holy Church not as a restriction or a limitation of their liberty, but as a privilege and as a freedom of the sons of God. Fidelity to God's mandates is hard and difficult because of the false viewpoint which is often taken. If it is looked upon as a hard task, a distasteful duty, a disagreeable labor, a service that must be given in a miserly and begrudging manner, then assuredly the way of God's Commandments is difficult, unpleasant and repugnant. If we regard the practice of our religion like the taking of some bitter medicine that must be accepted unwillingly and in the smallest possible doses, then our Lord's yoke will never be sweet, nor His burden light. But if the practice of our religion is looked upon not as a duty but as a privilege, a grace, a favor, an honor which our Lord does us in permitting us to serve Him,

then there will be no thought of the difficulty, nor the slightest stinginess in its practice, but on the contrary an alacrity and a generosity in its least requirement far beyond anything we could otherwise have hoped for. We shall not want to do as little as we can, but all that we can. We shall not regret that it is a duty to serve Him, but shall be glad to be bound to that service by our own free will for love of Him who was bound for us and for our healing.

As our Lord stands shackled under the walls of the Holy City in the moonlight among the olive trees, with the flaming torches waving round about Him, His thoughts will turn for comfort toward that long line of brave and holy men and women who have been inspired by this scene to bind their lives more closely to His. There will perhaps pass before His mental vision those countless numbers of generous souls who like Abraham have heard God's call: "Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land that I shall show thee."

He saw that vast throng, which no one can number, which because of His captivity that night will sever every human tie that the heart

holds dear, will snap the cords of earthly affection, and not content with being bound by His Commandments will unite themselves to Him by the priceless and most precious ties of the holy vows of voluntary poverty, chastity and obedience. This noble choice will be made by myriads of pure souls, not out of a spirit of fear and cowardice, not from any selfish and inordinate love for spiritual security —as is often said and said falsely, for sacrifices of this kind are not made by selfish cowards;—but they will snap the shackles of the world with its hopes, its promises, its prospects however alluring, because they have seen in their hours of prayer the meek Lamb of God bound and shackled for them on the eve of His most awful death on Mount Calvary.

It is this vision which has shone in upon their spirit and enkindled in their hearts a love and a courage enabling them to turn a deaf ear to the clamors of flesh and blood, strengthening them at the same time to break earth's dearest ties and to rise above their own feeble strength and rush in spirit to that shackled Master and kiss the cords that bound Him, which urges them, indeed, to plead that they, too, may be united to Him by a life of total surrender and complete self-sacrifice.

Our Lord bound that night by ropes and cords will be reminded of what He had done a few hours ago in the supper chamber when He gave to the Apostles and their successors the power to make Him a prisoner on God's altar that the fetters of sin might be stricken from men's lives. How many souls have been the slaves of passion, in a deeper servitude than the Jews of Egypt, and our imprisoned Saviour like a true Moses has by strength from the Tabernacle and the graces of the Sacraments struck from their souls the manacles of sin, and clothed them with the garment of His grace and His love. He has come to us and tabernacled with us not only by assuming our human nature and mingling with sinners as one of themselves, but He dwells with us for all time on the altar, bound within the Sacred Species that we may be free with the liberty which He has purchased for us by His Precious Blood.

It is but natural to feel a loyal love for one who comes to us and stands by us in times of stress and strain, in the serious emergencies and dangers of life, when those who ought to have been loyal and true abandon and desert us. What love then ought to be ours, what loyalty for the Prisoner of the Tabernacle,

who by His own free will is kept there in bonds for us! He is there as silent as regards external sounds as He was when bound on Holy Thursday night by the hands of His enemies; but His voice teaching, guiding, consoling, encouraging can be felt deep down in our souls, if we will only turn away from the noises and trifles of time, from the worldly distractions and the passing interests which absorb and engage us, and listen to the Master's loving whisper.

MIDNIGHT MOCKERY

"AND they brought Jesus to the High Priest." It was probably after midnight when the command was given the mob to move with their prisoner, well guarded, toward the house of the High Priest. They left the moonlit valley and led the bound Christ through the quiet and hushed streets toward their destination. The road lay probably along the eastern wall of the city, where they entered the gate through which only a few hours ago our Saviour and His Apostles had passed out from the Paschal supper.

They moved directly towards the palace of Annas, which stood on the slope between the upper city and the Tyropean valley which runs north and south through Jerusalem. At that hour the city would be hushed and asleep. The next day being the festival day all would have retired early so as to be astir and in time for the early morning solemnities in the Holy Temple. The tramp of soldiers was no unusual event in the Sacred City, especially at Passover time when troops were brought up from Cæsarea Philippi to intimidate the

multitude in case of need and as a warning of Roman power in view of possible disturbance. The procession then, with tramp of marchng men and glare of lights and torches, would cause little curiosity as to who the prisoner was that was guarded by Roman soldiers and servants of the Temple when brought to the High Priest.

"They led Him to Annas first." No one perhaps stands out more prominently in the history of these times among the Jews than this wicked, old man. Years and years ago he had been deposed from the High Priesthood by the Roman authorities, having held the sacred office only six or seven years.

Though deposed, he had never lost his control over and influence with the High Priests, having kept the Priesthood all those years within the circle of his family; and now his own son-in-law, Caiaphas, was ministering in the Temple as High Priest of this year, and exercising all the authority of this exalted position. Annas was a type of a man, alas, too common to-day. He was unscrupulous and without conscience, and he was a churchman of no embarrassing convictions. These convictions were sufficiently diluted by up-to-date notions and Roman ideas, to enable him

to curry popularity with the imperial officials without losing caste with his own nation. By winking and conniving at the traffic in the Temple, so violently put a stop to by our Blessed Saviour at the opening of His public life, Annas had amassed enormous wealth. This ill-gotten gold he could lend at a fat rate of interest to his needy Roman clients at the Prætorium. He was a man who worked in the dark and always under cover. He secretly held all the wires and kept his fingers upon all the strings, and the puppets danced, whether they were Temple or Roman officials, to his bidding and at his nod. He was cunning, cool and calculating. As he advanced in years he had grown astute, meanness had become a second nature to him and he was out and out malicious.

Caiaphas, his son-in-law, a wicked man too, but less shrewd and less acquainted with the mastery of self-control, had openly proclaimed our Lord's death a political necessity. "But one of them, named Caiaphas, being High Priest that year, said to them: 'You know nothing. Neither do you consider that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.'" No such indiscreet utterance could escape the lips

of the silent, crafty, self-contained Annas. He was too far-seeing to commit himself to even a word that could be used against him.

We have many an Annas today and to spare. There are men who sit in dark places and under cover spend their time in plotting and scheming. There are men whose hands are hidden, yet it is their influence that often holds back laws needed for the welfare of the country, and it is their shrewdness which steps in with amendments and clauses that nullify otherwise useful legislation. There are men who have defrauded the Government, and crushed smaller opponents by unscrupulous methods and by the illegal use of money. There are those, how contemptible they are! who commercialize the very religion to which in many cases they owe their success and popularity. Religion to these is not sacred and holy, but it has become a toll which they must pay to advance their political ambition and secure their worldly advantage. Exteriorly like Annas, they are experienced, suave, gentle, cultured, but deep down in their souls there is the lust for power and the greed for gold, and no scruple deters them in their efforts for success, provided they can shut out the light and work noiselessly in the dark. The one

thing they fear is detection, the one god they serve is public opinion.

It must have been a very deep humiliation for our Lord to be brought, illegally too, before a man of this type. Only a few hours ago at the supper He had said: "I am the way, the truth and the life." Now He who is infinite rectitude, infallible truth and eternal life, is to be examined without any authority, by a man who hates Him, and who is crafty, crooked, deceitful and probably without any belief in a future life. Our Lord is forced before the tribunal of one whose hatred of Him knows no bounds.

From the day when Christ whipped the buyers and sellers from the Temple porches, and exposed to public gaze the extortion and greed of Annas and his dark and hidden agreements with the Priests and avaricious venders who were desecrating God's holy house, Annas, filled with bitter hatred, had not forgotten, let alone forgiven. Only a few days ago the wound had been opened anew, the bitterness of his hatred had again been intensified when our Lord had the second time cleansed the Temple of its venal traffickers who were in league with the Priesthood. Judas, himself, showed his knowledge of the character of our

Lord's arch-enemy when he bargained with Annas for his Master's Blood. The unfortunate traitor had no doubt seen in the eyes of that silent, crafty man the fire of hate and the longing for revenge. He knew, too, at least from common report, his immense wealth and, possibly, he hoped for a larger reward.

There can be no doubt that Annas was the man, more than anyone else, who was responsible for our Lord's capture and death. Since the raising of Lazarus from the dead, a few weeks ago, our Blessed Saviour's popularity had grown enormously. He was becoming more and more every day the idol of the people. He had always been popular in Galilee, and now that the city was thronged with tens of thousands of Galileans to add their voices to the public enthusiasm, the shrewd eye of the astute Annas was not long in detecting the favor with which our Blessed Saviour was daily being received. His advanced age, his intimate knowledge of the city and its rulers, his contact with the hidden forces and concealed springs of political influence, all these showed him a way at once of compassing the undoing of Christ. He was jealous for his own control of the popular mind, and he must have observed with rancor

and regret that his own personal influence was on the wane. Thus there can scarcely be any doubt that the hand of Annas was secretly busy in every movement. His influence, though hidden, was at work. His money, too, was silently breaking down any quiet and timid opposition to our Lord's capture and death.

There is a tradition that Annas had retired before the mob when their Prisoner reached the palace. While awaiting his pleasure and convenience the Roman soldiers were naturally dismissed. They had received orders to deliver Jesus into his hands, and this done they immediately retired to their barracks. Thus they passed from the scene, they had done their work and we shall see them no more. While watching for the coming of Annas, and to preclude all possibility of escape, it is believed that our Lord was bound to an olive tree, and so after midnight He stands there bound and tied, awaiting the pleasure of his wicked and malicious enemy.

It was at the midnight hour that God's angel flew over Egypt and broke the bonds of His people in slavery, but no angel will set free the Son of God, for He is bound by His own choice and by His own love. Thirty-three

years ago, out on Bethlehem's hills, Mary bound His childish limbs with swathing bands when for the first time "He came among His own and His own received Him not." To-night Mary is absent in an agony of sorrow and may not come to console Him.

The wicked Annas, bent with age and seared with crime, appeared after a short and restless sleep, and demanded unjustly that the Prisoner be brought before him. He can scarcely conceal his joy and satisfaction at the success of his diabolical machinations. He had too long meditated this wickedness, taken too many precautions, paid too much money to permit that any detail, when everything had been so carefully foreseen, should go astray at this stage of the conspiracy. Rubbing his wrinkled hands in nervous delight, his black eyes afire with hate and with thinly concealed anxiety and eagerness to entrap our Blessed Saviour into some word that would compromise Him, he "asked Jesus of His disciples and His doctrine."

There was no slightest movement of our Lord and His disciples, there was no least detail of His teaching which had escaped the secret investigation of Annas's minions. His hatred and jealousy were too deep to leave

untried any expedient that could have any bearing upon our Lord's undoing. This deceitful and most wicked hypocrite with whose unlawful profit in the Temple our Lord had interfered and whose prestige had been dimmed by our Lord's teachings, was too unrelenting an enemy to leave any loophole for escape. The fact that he could not openly oppose Christ made him only the more bitter; yet such was his keen desire to trump up some charge of sedition or false teaching, a deeper crime in the eyes of the orthodox, that he could not refrain from the illegal proceeding of questioning Christ under his own roof. Our Lord by His answer foiled the crafty old degenerate. Jesus answered him:

"I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple, whither all the Jews resort, and in secret have I spoken nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them who have heard what I have spoken unto them; behold, they know what things I have said."

To this noble answer came the response of a blow in the face from the hand of an ignorant, insolent servant of the High Priest This blow went unrebuked by His cruel, priestly investigator. Our Lord, without mur-

mur, without complaint, without any assertion of His divine power, without indignation of His profaned Godhead only answers, gently questioning the reason of the insult. May we not hope that the tender words of our Blessed Saviour, and above all His kind look, went to the heart and won to His love the unfortunate man who struck the blow?

"He gave Jesus a blow." Think of the beauty of that Face thus ruthlessly profaned by a mailed hand. Thirty-three years ago Mary in an ecstasy of love looked into that Face and fancied she saw in it a resemblance of her own beautiful countenance, and that look was a beatific vision, for it was the sight of the Face of God. When the aged Simeon bent with years tottered into the Temple and, taking the Child into his trembling arms, looked into that Sacred Face, his heart was filled with joy and he yearned for naught else that earth could give, but was willing to lay down life's burden, and he sang joyfully his "Nunc dimittis." There was nothing now to be wished for more on this side of the grave. As that Face changed from infancy to boyhood and on through the years into the fullness of manhood, it was an ever growing delight to His Mother and was the most beautiful of all

that earth had ever seen. A few hours ago in the Garden the tears streamed down that Sacred Face and the Blood bedewed it beneath the olive trees. Tomorrow He shall lie dead with His Sacred Head in Mary's lap, and the dear, dead Face will be upturned to His Mother's in all the disfigurement of death, and yet there will be a wondrous beauty for His Mother in that white face.

All the long weary waiting in Purgatory is endurable because lit up with the hope of one day looking into that Sacred Countenance. What a destiny then is ours, what a gift beyond the telling and a favor beyond fancy's wildest flights is in store for us,—no less than the vision of that sweet Face, the Face of Mary's Child, through all the ages of eternity! That Face is now hidden behind the Tabernacle veil; yet with the eye of faith we can see it as clearly and as really as God's angel saw it that night in Annas's hall when it was profaned by the rough mailed hand of the High Priest's servant.

SILENCE BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST

"AND they brought Jesus to the High Priest; and all the Priests and the Ancients and Scribes assembled together." There is a well-founded opinion that the palace of the High Priest was a large and spacious building to which a courtyard was attached. In this palatial residence, probably in different parts, dwelt Caiaphas and his father-in-law, Annas. Our Blessed Saviour, then, in going from Annas to the High Priest was led across the courtyard to the hall where His enemies were impatiently awaiting His coming. Amid the confusion and the jeering of the throng who had witnessed the indignities before Annas, and insulted by the common servants and the rabble that hung around the palace, our Lord was brought, considerably after midnight, into the presence of the High Priest and the other official representatives of the Jewish law assembled to judge Him. All the grades of the council had doubtless been summoned on that occasion, but it is scarcely probable that every member was present. St. Mark tells us that all joined in His condemnation; but as Joseph

and Nicodemus would hardly have been guilty of such treachery and cowardice we can conclude that they were absent; perhaps, as friends of Christ, they had not been invited.

It was a strange scene into which our Blessed Saviour was introduced in the council chamber. The members sat in a semi-circle so that they could see each other; two clerks occupying places to the right and left were in front of them whose duty it was to take down the substance of the defence and prosecution. The whole assembly was presided over and dominated by the High Priest. Into this assembly our Lord was led, presumably clad in mourning as was the custom.

Only a few hours ago our Saviour had kindly upbraided His sleeping Apostles, because they could not watch one hour with Him. He had gently found fault with them because their eyes were heavy, while His in His prayer were filled with tears. His enemies, however, those bent upon taking His life, were indefatigible in their efforts for His undoing. They sought no rest in sleep. Every sacrifice of time and energy would be well rewarded, if they could accomplish their wicked purpose and rid the festal solemnities of the presence of this malefactor.

The whole proceeding of this midnight mockery of justice, about to begin, was utterly illegal and unjust. Years ago, indeed some forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the Sanhedrin had ceased to pronounce capital punishment, yet that night the whole assembly declared Christ worthy of death. They did not condemn Him to the gibbet of the cross because they had not the power. When Pilate later said to them: "Take Him you and judge Him according to your law," the Jews said to him: "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." No process, especially none of such importance as to involve human life, could be begun at night or on Sabbaths, on feast days, or on their eves. It is clear, then, that the whole proceeding was illegal, and that through passion, jealousy and hatred His enemies were reckless about the observance of the law in their eagerness for His death.

"And the chief priests and the whole council sought false witnesses against Jesus that they might put Him to death." The day had been a busy one for the chief priests and the members of the Sanhedrin. No detail needed to bring their deep-laid plots to a successful issue had been forgotten or overlooked.

Promises which would not be kept had been made, bribes had been offered and money had been circulated freely. Witnesses had been obtained and drilled who would have no scruple in doing the bidding of their masters and swearing to falsehoods. They would in His trial ostentatiously abide by the law which read: "By the mouth of two or three witnesses shall he die that is to be slain. Let no man put him to death when only one beareth witness against him."

Some, doubtless, who were present on this occasion had seen the discomfiture of Annas in the short examination of our Blessed Saviour, and these no doubt suggested different tactics. Instead, therefore, of questioning Him about His doctrine and His disciples, they now tried to convict Him of crime from the testimony of witnesses, men who said that they had heard with their own ears His wicked words and had seen with their own eyes His infamous deeds. Hatred, jealousy and envy would easily distort and exaggerate the meaning of many of our Lord's words and misjudge His acts. Our Blessed Saviour could have readily explained away their accusations and could have fully vindicated Himself; but any vindication He knew only too well would

be useless, as His death was determined upon, and He preferred to remain silent. So openly did the witnesses contradict each other, and so worthless was their evidence against the Prisoner that their testimony broke down and the trumped up charges had to be abandoned.

Our Lord through this humiliating scene was calm, and His impressive silence must under the circumstances have contributed not a little to the confusion of His accusers. "And last of all came two witnesses: and they said: 'This man said, I am able to destroy the Temple of God and after three days to rebuild it.'" The case so far had been mismanaged and nothing had been accomplished, yet some evidence must be procured, so that this man could be dragged before the Roman Governor and condemned to death before the people awoke and began thronging to the Temple for the Paschal festivities. Hope at last revives and success hangs now upon the production of fresh testimony.

The new witnesses hark back to the first time our Lord had come into open conflict with the Temple authorities and with the avarice of the Priests. Three years ago when with whip and scourge He had cleansed God's house from the buying and selling by avari-

cious traffickers, they had questioned Him as to His authority for such an intrusion into the sacred precincts and such an invasion of their rights, and our Lord answered: "Destroy this Temple and after three days I will rebuild it." This charge if dexterously manipulated and pushed intensively might have had much weight with the Roman Governor. This His enemies knew full well.

An impression at this time when the Sacred City was so densely crowded, that there was a man within its walls who had threatened to lay violent hands upon the sacred Temple, claiming the power to destroy it, would have branded our Lord as a fanatical pretender and a dangerous seducer of the ignorant populace. Nothing could lead so quickly to a sudden outburst of anger and tumult among the people. This Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, feared before all else; and the popularity of Pontius Pilate in Rome and his political power in the Imperial City, even his tenure of office, depended largely upon his keeping the Jews quiet and forestalling any disorder especially at the critical time of the Passover. This charge, then, would have impressed Pilate; and Caiaphas was not so much on the lookout for a capital crime against the Jewish

law as he was for an accusation that would influence and persuade the Roman Governor to do away with their Prisoner.

But the charge upon which such hopes had been built broke down at once through the disagreement of these two witnesses required by the Mosaic law, and scrupulously provided for. They openly contradicted each other. All through this judicial farce our Lord preserved a majestic and impressive silence and uttered not a word. At length in an effort to intimidate and browbeat his helpless Prisoner, the High Priest rose up and demanded in shrill, angry tones, which reechoed through the council chamber:

"Answerest Thou nothing to the things that are laid to Thy charge?"

He held His peace and answered nothing.

How eloquent the silence and how needed the lesson in our daily lives! Eloquent because of the compelling sweetness of His speech, had He spoken. No man in the world's history ever spoke as the Eternal Son made Flesh, the Word of the Father, spoke during the days of His sojourning among the children of men. Whether on Galilean hill or on sanded seashore, washed by the waters of the Lake, or on the marble steps of Jerusalem's

wondrous Temple, His words were the sweetest, the tenderest and the most consoling which had ever fallen from human lips, but these words were always uttered for the comfort and the healing of souls and not for His own vindication and defence against the charges of His enemies. Now when His soul was racked with pain, overwhelmed with shame, bathed in grief, His delicate, sensitive, keen sense of justice blistered and smarting under the falsehoods of His enemies, "He held His peace and answered nothing."

How difficult we find silence in our own lives, and how almost impossible! Under unjust and false charges for most of us, unprayerful as we are, silence is painful and wearing, and yet we shall never lead prayerful and recollected lives without it. We fret under it and find it always unsatisfactory, distressing and void because our souls are not full of God; but under unjust or exaggerated or at times even true charges how utterly impossible to hold our peace! We are so eager to defend our rights and save our reputations. We owe it to ourselves and families, we owe it to our good name as Catholics. God's glory will be promoted, we say, by keeping our fair name unsullied and untainted. All this may be very

true, but self-love too easily creeps in. Hurt feelings smarting under the real or imaginary injustice so blind us, anger and vindictiveness are so easily in the ascendency, that we readily forget the midnight scene in the council chamber of Caiaphas' palace where Jesus, the Eternal Son of God and the Word of the Father, "held His peace and answered nothing." In such moments when we writhe under the sting and bite of thoughtless and, at times, envious tongues, it were better to steal into the quiet under the sanctuary lamp and meditate with a spirit of faith upon the silence of the Master in the Tabernacle, better to take no other action than that which His grace coming to us from the altar will suggest and prompt, and His silent example teach. This will bring us more peace and more holiness than all the defences our wounded pride can offer and all the excuses our blinded and deceptive vanity can allege.

CAIAPHAS and the Priests were disconcerted and utterly upset by the persistent silence of their Prisoner. Disappointed in their witnesses and humiliated by their manifest contradiction they feared that the plans which they had so carefully laid for our Lord's undoing might after all their precautions prove to be failures, and that He would escape their vengeance and be at large on the festival day. They cunningly thought to entrap their victim in His words, but His silence foiled them and even threatened to thwart entirely their evil designs.

Before that calm, majestic and innocent silent Man they felt no doubt their own weaknesses. They recognized only too vividly the unlawful plots laid for His death, while a sense of guilt must have pressed heavily upon them in the presence of that blameless Captive, as their poisoned arrows of unholy zeal, envy and hatred fell harmless at His feet. His silence, then, was all the more disconcerting, all the more maddening. Were they to lose in this struggle merely because this Man held

His peace? Was He to win because a few stupid witnesses had not lied consistently, and He had cleverly held His tongue? Was His life, which was such a trifle in their sight, in reality a charmed one? Was it proof against their crafty scheming and cunning devices? Was He so invulnerable that He could not be reached even by calumny confirmed by oath? Was all the money scattered for His defeat to be wasted? Surely there must be some way of reaching and undoing this disturber of the peace, this seducer of the people. It was inconceivable that they should fail with all the wealth, power and influence at their command, now that they had Jesus in their hands and victory within their grasp.

They had already questioned Him about His doctrine and His disciples, about the words that fell from His lips and the companions of His choice for the last three years of His life. Only one road now remained open for His conviction, only one card was left to be played; one charge which would lead either to His rejection or His acknowledgment by the synagogue; only one pretension which needed to be recognized by the Priests, and this Man would be rejected as Messias, and before set of sun would hang from the gibbet and die a

death of shame on Golgotha's hill. Triumph or defeat, glory or ignominy, life or death hinged upon the success of that last device, His answer to that final question. Our Lord knew this and so did His judge, the High Priest Caiaphas.

The wicked man then determined to force the issue. The hours were passing and there was need of haste. Soon the early worshippers would be trooping to the Temple for the solemnities of the Passover, and this Man must be gotten out of the way. He knew well the Captive's pretensions and felt sure that if pressed He would not deny that He claimed to be the promised Messias and the Son of God. There was no doubt in the mind of the crafty Priest that, if he forced our Lord to an open avowal of His claims, the Elders assembled for His trial would be turned against Him. Once these pretensions were made public, open condemnation was assured.

Away then with the stammering and blundering witnesses, let us have done with the conflicting testimony of men who have heard His public utterances. Let us hear His own words, let us listen to what He has to say of Himself; from His own mouth we shall judge

and condemn Him. "And the High Priest said to Him: 'I adjure Thee by the living God that Thou tell us if Thou be Christ the Son of God. Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the living God?" In a paroxysm of disappointment, anger and possibly fear lest his last scheme would fail, Caiaphas rose up and strode into the middle of the judgment chamber, before all the assembled Elders, determined to hear from our Lord's lips whether He claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God. A strange question from the High Priest, a minister in the holy Temple, to one who was a helpless victim in his power. How could that poor despised outcast, his captive, bound with cords and chains, how could He be the "Christ, the Son of the living God?" If Caiaphas had any doubt on this point why had he hounded so vigorously the false and lying witnesses against Him? Evidently it was his intention and desire to convict our Lord from His own admission. To such a question then and on such a point our Blessed Saviour could permit of no misunderstanding.

Not so long ago His kindness and tenderness by the Lake in feeding the multitude had won all hearts and they wanted to make Him King, but He set aside the royal offer. He

would not wear Herod's crown nor wield his sceptre. Now on the last day of His life when questioned by the High Priest himself in his official capacity, when adjured in the name of His Heavenly Father, when asked for a last testimony to the truth of His mission, our Lord, though He knew the truth would be rejected, would not refuse an answer. As His silence had been solemn and impressive, so now His speech.

After this formal adjuration by the High Priest a deathless quiet reigned throughout the hall. All eyes instinctively turned from the High Priest of the Old Law to the helpless Prisoner, the High Priest of the New. For a moment the suspense was unbearable, and then that voice, firm, solemn and clear, admitted that He was the Son of God, and His Father would show Him to be such in His resurrection and His sitting at the right hand of the Most High. Jesus said to him: "Thou hast said it." Again Jesus said to him: "I am. Nevertheless I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

In a few hours standing before the Roman Governor He will say: "for this was I born,

and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony of the truth." To give this testimony to Caiaphas would end His life in the shedding of His Blood today at the ninth hour; but our Lord had counted the cost. He knew the glory which would accrue to His Father from this avowal, and the fruit to numberless souls, and so "setting the joy before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." Then the High Priest rent his garments, saying:

"He hath blasphemed. What further need have we of witnesses? Behold now you have heard the blasphemy. What think you?"

"Blasphemy, blasphemy," was whispered from lip to lip around the priestly semi-circle, while Caiaphas, in shrill and loud tones shouted to the assembly as he rent his garments in over-acted horror: "He hath blasphemed," and demanded His instant condemnation.

They had attained their purpose, accomplished their designs and had convicted Christ from the testimony of His own lips. They had all heard, and according to the law the High Priest had rent his garments with a rending which could never be repaired, in proof of the enormity of the crime. Better a thouand times had Caiaphas or his priests obeyed

the injunction of Holy Writ, "Rend your hearts and not your garments and turn to the law of your God." Why prolong the proceedings? Any further charge is unnecessary. There is no more need of witnesses. His guilt is proved. The Prisoner has condemned Himself by His own shocking blasphemy. Read God's own words in the Sacred Scripture. What do they tell us? "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Bring forth the blasphemer without the camp; and let them that heard him, put their hands upon his head; and let all the people stone him. And thou shalt speak to the children of Israel: The man that curseth his God, shall bear his sin; and he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, dying let him die: all the multitude shall stone him, whether he be a native or a stranger. He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, dying let him die." There was the law, the case is settled, there is no choice. Then the High Priest solemnly asked them their candid opinion. "What think you?" But they answering said: "He is guilty of death."

Only a few years after our Lord's death His first martyr was to utter almost the self-same words, and from them and the vision vouchsafed him in his last struggle, was to obtain

the strength to fight to the end and triumph. St. Stephen when his turn came to be a witness to His Master, and to give the highest testimony that any man may give, the testimony of blood, became a witness as Holy Writ tells us: "He, being full of the Holy Ghost looking up steadfastly to heaven saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And he said: 'Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'"

Upon our Lord, then, the formal sentence had been passed. He was adjudged guilty of death. This condemnation would be confirmed in the morning by a more deliberate sentence; but we have here the Priests and Elders of the nation acting in their official capacity, decreeing the death of the Son of God. This execrable crime of deicide which was so formally decided upon on that night and which was the crime of the assembled Sanhedrin will be ratified on the morrow and made the crime of the whole nation, when in response to the last and despairing appeal of a weak Roman Governor the unfortunate Jews will cry out in the streets of Jerusalem: "His Blood be upon us and upon our children!" That cry sealed the fate of the inno-

cent, immaculate Lamb of God; for that wild cry was like the cry of angry beasts in a dark forest, and terrified the Governor into passing an unjust sentence.

THE NIGHT OF TORTURE

THE High Priest had appealed to our Lord's enemies. They had heard the blasphemy. He had claimed to be the Son of God and so they had judged Him worthy of death. Out of His own mouth they had convicted Him, for He had blasphemed the Most High. There was a strange belief at this time among the Jews. They held that the golden band on the High Priest's mitre, on which were graven the words, "Holiness unto Yahweh" had the power on the day of atonement, of satisfying for those who blasphemed and repairing for their blasphemy. But in the hearts of men like Caiaphas in which burnt fiercely the fires of hatred, there could be no smallest nook or corner for any possibility of pardon to lurk. The mitre of a divine dignity, silence and meekness which shone over the consecrated brow of the Man-God was invisible to the jaundiced eyes of the Priests who were that night determined to take His life.

All day they had plotted and toiled for His undoing, yet all their efforts had failed and they were forced to distort and twist into a

blasphemy the words which He had uttered. Upon these they pounced as wild beasts upon their prey, and condemned Him to death when all else had failed. Triumph gleamed in their eyes and congratulations were on every lip as the excited throng brought the farcical proceedings to an end. Their victim and captive was alone unmoved, calm, silent and divine.

Now that their sinful and wicked purpose was accomplished, the assembly broke up and they dispersed to their homes. The day had been a busy and anxious one. From early morning they had been occupied in plotting and scheming, hurrying from place to place, gathering false witnesses and rehearsing their testimony. The journey to the Garden and our Lord's capture had been a task of exceeding anxiety. The long hours of examination and trial with its disappointments had been wearisome and disturbing. But they had been rewarded by the testimony of the accused Himself who had apparently played into the hands of the clever Caiaphas. But all is well that ends well and they could now go home content and take some rest, before the final triumph which on the morrow would crown their zealous efforts. The whole incident had been most annoying, but still it was well worth

all their strivings if they could bring things to a successful issue, as now seemed certain.

The Priests went to their homes, promising to reassemble at an early hour and make an end of this disagreeable business. They did not neglect to give the strictest commands to His keepers to guard their Prisoner most carefully. Fidelity to duty during the night is promised generous reward, neglect threatened with severe penalties. Had the Priests only known that their Captive was a willing victim, there had been no need of such injunctions. The guards might have retired to rest, they might have thrown open the doors, and have broken the shackles on His sacred hands and feet. He was a willing Prisoner, "He was offered, because it was His own will."

Holy writers have told us that no pen can describe, no imagination picture the indignities to which our Blessed Lord was subjected during the dark hours of this night of horror. Every revolting insult, every mark of contempt and every injustice which suggested itself to the minds of these coarse, brutal men was heaped upon their unresisting and helpless victim. Possibly some of the Priests, anxious to make sure that our Lord would not escape, tarried for a time to satisfy themselves that

there would be no neglect. The servants of Caiaphas and the guards, ignorant men knowing the disposition of the Priests towards Christ, were only too eager to curry favor with their masters, and were thus spurred on to greater ingenuity in inventing humiliating tortures and to more cruel efforts in inflicting them. Possibly the Priests before leaving for their comfortable homes may have flung a last stinging taunt at their victim by telling Him to call on His twelve legions of Angels for help, or by asking Him about His promise to rebuild the Temple of the Sacred City.

The servants of the High Priests, the guards and the common rabble now united in heaping insults and indignities upon the innocent Lamb of God. The innate vulgarity of such a throng, which loves to trample upon fallen greatness now found full scope. Their natural cruelty, freed from restraint by the withdrawal of their masters, was now unchained and sought full satisfaction in unspeakable brutalities, affording pleasure and amusement to the vile throng usually gathered among the dregs of the hangers-on about the palace and the courts. Yet all through that dreary night of horrors in the dark dungeon that lonely Sufferer, not defenseless, but undefending, not conquered,

but unresisting, not helpless but voluntarily submitting to taunts, blows and indignities, was both paying the penalty in His own Person for crimes committed against the Godhead, and furnishing an example which in future centuries would comfort and encourage under insult and humiliation myriads of unborn children, when writhing under pain and shame they would kneel in spirit at His sacred feet, and look into His face covered with spittle and from that vision learn to be like Him.

Since those hours in the dark dungeon, when through the long night our Lord was the plaything of the common rabble and scum of the sacred city, His holy ones have loved that livery of shame and gloried to be garbed with the garments of humiliation. What to the world has been a vesture of weakness and ignominy, has been to them a sacred and holy chasuble of strength and honor. When human nature writhes and shrinks back from insult and injury, when the blush mantles the cheek and fires kindle in the eyes under injustice, when passion, pride and anger clamor for indulgence, then the vision of the Innocent Sufferer rises above the darkness of the storm raging wildly in human souls, and that vision calms and strengthens and brings peace.

Sometimes one wonders if we have advanced much beyond the brutality of that scene. The wild cry of the French Revolution "Destroy the Infamous One," meaning to banish Christ from the hearts of men; still more the teaching of innocent children to place flowers before the banners on which was inscribed that blood-curdling cry; the desire of the French statesman of today to blot out from the heavens the name of Christ; the efforts of men to keep God out of the schools and out of the souls of our little ones, efforts favored and abetted at times by bad Catholics; are not these proofs that men care as little nowadays for the Man-God and His teachings as did His torturers that night in the cellars of the High Priest's palace; and that they are just as ready to revile and insult Him in the person of His Church and His children?

The painful scenes we are contemplating are told us in detail by the Evangelists: "And the men that held Him, mocked Him and struck him. And some began to spit on Him, and to cover His face, and to buffet Him, and to say unto Him: 'Prophesy'; and the servants struck Him with the palms of their hands." St. Luke adds: "And the men that held Him, mocked Him and struck

Him. And they blindfolded Him and smote His face." Not a word, not a murmur, not a complaint escaped the lips of the Divine Sufferer during these long hours. No rebuke to His torturers, no indignant expression of outraged Majesty, no cry of distress from a nature infinitely sensitive to every slight and insult. He was a willing victim. His Father had pressed the chalice to His lips and to the deepest, bitterest dregs He would drain it. Slowly but entirely and lovingly would He drink of the cup of humiliation and sorrow.

Let us pause for a moment and reflect upon the varieties of pain, shame, reproaches and sufferings to which our loving and innocent Saviour submitted during those hours of torture and horror. What an agony the cords and ropes which bound His sacred limbs must have caused! How meekly He bore the buffets which were rained upon Him by the rough servants and cruel soldiers! Contemplate the livid marks upon His pale but beautiful Face, the Face into which the Angels were looking in an ecstasy of wonder and adoration, the Face which Mary had so often and tenderly kissed. As we kneel and see those sacred eyes covered with a filthy rag and hear the savage blows upon His holy countenance, can we for-

get the words of the prophet: "He shall give His cheek to him that striketh Him. He shall be filled with reproaches"?

As we meditate upon this scene can we not gain courage to suffer for His sake and His love? Will not the memory of these sufferings stand us in good stead, when our vanity is wounded, our pride touched, our sensitiveness pricked? How much braver in daily humiliations we should be at times if before the Tabernacle we pondered on the horrors of this awful night! We shall be stouter of heart if we can make the long hours in the dungeon in the Priests' palace a living memory in our daily lives.

IN THE GOVERNOR'S HALL

THE night of humiliation in the dark dungeon of the cellars of the High Priest's palace was past and gone, and the gray light of the dawn was streaking the east over Moab and Edom, but there was no light breaking upon the sad and desolate soul of our Blessed Saviour. When He was brought to the judgment hall, where last night He had been condemned, the sentence was quickly reaffirmed by the assembled Sanhedrin, who had unanimously determined to lead Him to the Governor so that at his command the sentence might be executed. The Parasceve of the Pasch had come, and haste was necessary that this man might be put to death and this disagreeable matter finished before the important day of the festivities.

They who had condemned our Lord had rested well during the night; their sleep had been all the more sound and refreshing, because "this malefactor," who had so long eluded their grasp, was at last safely locked within the dungeons of the High Priest's palace. Little time was lost in congratulating one another upon their success, and they set to

work immediately to pass the final sentence, and led Him away quickly to the Governor's palace.

The Governor, Pontius Pilate, had come up from Cæsarea Philippi to be present in the city during the Passover, not out of any reverence for the Jewish rites, but to be on hand to control the vast multitude, which at that time thronged to the festival, and to prevent, by force if necessary, anything in the nature of disorder or tumult. An uprising of the discontented Jews at this season would make short shrift of Pilate's influence in the Imperial City, and would undoubtedly lead to his removal from office.

The Governor with his wife was probably stopping at Herod's truly royal palace, a little northwest of the Fortress Antonia, which itself was just north of the Temple. Early in the morning a messenger had brought the news to the Governor that the Priests and the Ancients of the people would bring a prisoner before him for judgment; possibly he had heard of the excitement, the capture of the Galilean prophet had caused during the night, and was somewhat prepared for the approach of the authorities with their victim.

Informed of the presence of the Priests and

their Prisoner, the Governor invited them into the portals of the palace, so that he might hear the case and pass sentence. But no Jew, much less a Priest, would enter the portals of a Gentile home, especially on the eve of a great festival. "And they went not into the hall, that they might not be defiled, but that they might eat the Pasch." They had no scruple about taking the life of an innocent man; that to them, blinded by hatred and envy, was of little importance compared with the legal defilement incurred by entering the Gentile palace.

It was about seven o'clock or earlier, when the Governor went out to hear the charges of the Priests against our Blessed Saviour. A strange scene indeed it was, upon which Pilate looked down as he faced the throng in the open square below. Anger and hatred toward their prisoner were stamped upon the countenances of the accusers. The mob increasing every moment, though not so determined apparently, was evidently swerving in sympathy toward the hatred of their Priests and leaders. But what must have impressed the haughty Roman most was the pitiable appearance of their victim. Our Lord's soul had been stirred by the tenderest emotions at the Last Supper,

the evening before, and in the Garden He had struggled last night in His agony even to the sweating of blood, so that under the strain He would have died, had not the Father sent an angel to comfort and support Him. He had been rudely dragged from the Garden to Annas, and from Annas to Caiaphas.

The long dark hours of the night had been passed in the dungeons of the High Priest's palace, where He had been the plaything of the rough guards, who had amused themselves by heaping upon their inoffensive victim every indignity. At early dawn, without food or refreshment, He had been again dragged across the city to the Governor's Palace, where He now stood awaiting sentence. What an object of pity our Lord, with His garments torn, His hair dishevelled, His face soiled, His hands bound, must have presented to the eyes of the proud Roman as they fell upon this object of Jewish fear and hate!

Pilate, anxious to expedite the case, and get rid of the disagreeable business, for it was the eve of the festival day, and many duties claimed his attention, went at once to the heart of the difficulty. He asked them:

"What accusation bring you against this man?"

The question was unexpected, and took the Priests by surprise.

They were humiliated by this query, for they had probably sent word that the prisoner was already condemned, and now Pilate was opening up the whole question again; and so, in an irritated tone, they replied:

"If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him to thee."

But the Governor had no intention, at least at this stage of the proceedings, of becoming a public executioner, at the whim of an envious priesthood, so he said to them:

"Take Him you, and judge Him according to your law."

The Jews declined to accept this offer to judge Him before their own tribunal, as they had no power to pronounce a capital sentence. They were further put to it to trump up a charge to which was due the penalty of death. St. Luke has explicitly given us this charge: "And they began to accuse Him, saying: 'We have found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, and saying He is Christ, the King.'"

When the Governor heard this, he went into the Judgment Hall, and ordered our Lord to be brought to him. It was a strange scene

indeed, the Governor appointed by the power of Imperial Rome, summoning to his presence, for judgment, the Eternal Son of God, who was one day to judge the living and the dead. Pilate, sat down in his gilded, marble chair of justice in all the robes of office, and our Lord, as far as Pilate knew, was a poor miserable outcast, hunted to death by His own people, because of His foolish pretension to royalty.

Our Blessed Saviour soon made it clear that that He ambitioned no earthly crown and desired to wield no royal sceptre; no purple garments of earthly kingship were to replace the seamless robe upon Him, which Mary so long ago had woven at Nazareth, with deft and loving fingers. The Kingdom He wished to establish was not one of this world, but of the next. His Kingdom was a spiritual one. Impressed by the patience and meekness of our Lord under suffering, and by His more than human bearing and demeanor, the Governor was satisfied that the charges of the Priests and Ancients of the people were false and that there was no question here of a political offense, or of a crime against the State or the authority of Rome. He went forth again and said to the Chief Priests and the multitude: "I find no cause in Him."

This answer aroused and stirred up anew the anger and fears of His enemies. And now backed by the multitude, whose support they had pleaded for during Pilate's absence in interrogating our Lord, they became bolder and more insistent in their demands. In the midst of the wild uproar of anger and hatred, our Lord remained quiet and silent; the storm raged wildly and furiously about Him, but He enjoyed unalterable peace, though His body was racked with pain. and His soul smarted with humiliation and shame. For the Gospel tells us: "When He was accused by the Chief Priests and Ancients He answered nothing." Pilate asked Him saying:

"Answerest Thou nothing? Dost Thou not hear how great testimonies they allege against Thee?"

"And He answered him never a word, so that the Governor wondered exceedingly."

How eloquent His silence, a thousand times more eloquent than any word of self-defense, as He looked out meekly and with pity upon that furious mob, thirsting for His blood, too blind to be influenced by any words of His. He held His peace and wept for them in spirit as His eyes had wept for them only last Sunday on Mount Olivet, when they

greeted Him with glad Hosannas, so soon to be changed to curses. Why should He speak? They would not listen. And if they did, then His word would only have lent force to their wild cries for His blood.

Pilate was more touched and impressed by His silence than by any rebuttal of charges which he had already admitted to be false. There was nothing that our Lord could say to win their love that He had not said already. Had they thought, they could have remembered His words of tenderness and yearning for their souls. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest those that are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children as a hen doth gather her chickens, and thou wouldst not!" Deep down in His soul, He was saying with Isaias, though His lips moved not, "And now, ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and ye men of Judea, judge between Me and My vineyard. What is there that I ought to do to My vineyard that I have not done?" There was one thing more: He could die; and He was now on His way to that supreme sacrifice of love.

How sadly we need the lesson of that eloquent silence taught by our suffering Saviour! How ready we are to defend ourselves! How

quick to resent the slightest word that reflects upon our motives or our actions! How keenly sensitive to the smallest criticism, even when provoked and just! How far we are from the prayerful silence of our Lord, and the scene we have been contemplating! Excuses are readily found or are invented to justify our speaking, deluding ourselves that we cannot possibly be speaking for self-defense, but for the spiritual good of the offender or for the protection of others from similar pain. Such excuses are the sheerest delusions of self-love, and illusions of wounded pride and an indulgence of sentiments and feelings of resentment and vindictiveness. In most cases a moderate degree of self-conquest and an infinitesimal grain of mortification of which there is so little in our lives would induce us to keep at least a patient silence.

If in our daily lives we would, under the silent flickering of the sanctuary lamp, recall this scene where our Lord held His peace, when self-defense was so justifiable, as it was before Pilate; if sympathy for our silent suffering Lord would grow from day to day in our souls, we would not only be silent through a spirit of mortification, but because our souls are eager and our hearts are warm to be like

Him who held His peace while the Priests, Ancients and people, in their hatred, uttered their falsehoods against Him.

PILATE AND HEROD

PILATE, unscrupulous as he was, could not, at this stage of the tragedy, be induced to condemn our Lord in spite of the clamors of the Jews. He knew full well that He was no criminal, no rebel, but a victim of jealousy and malice. Innocence and sinlessness, perceptible even to the spiritually blind eyes of the Roman Governor, were stamped upon that sacred countenance. No cries of envy, no clamors for blood, re-echoing in a perfect hail-storm of accusation through the Prætorium and in the ears of the Governor, could force his hand to this unjust deed of cruelty and death.

Pilate was tired of the wrangling, and weary of the evidently trumped-up unrighteous proceedings. He fain would have dismissed the charges, but he feared the Priests. They might arouse the fickle mob, and possibly could excite a tumult among the people. In that event, the tide of popularity would set against him in Imperial Rome, and the sun of his little day of glory in the East would move rapidly to a setting.

Suddenly among the wild, confused cries, which broke out like strong waves beating against a cliff, the Governor heard the word, "Galilee." His brow knitted in thought for a moment, and then the wrinkles smoothed out, and an expression of relief settled upon the troubled face, as he heard the Jews yelling in angry cries: "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place." But Pilate, hearing of Galilee, asked if the man were a Galilean. "And when he understood that He was of Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him away to Herod, who also was himself in Jerusalem in those days."

These words brought a calm to the disturbed soul of Pilate. They contained a solution to the problem he had all morning been vainly trying to solve; and the riddle, which so far had baffled his crafty, skilful ingenuity, was at last unravelled. He would send the prisoner to Herod. He could thus shirk the guilt of a judicial murder by placing the responsibility upon the shoulders of the Galilean ruler. It would sit lightly upon Herod's conscience already seared deep with what seemed, even to the pagan Governor, greater and more wicked crimes.

This weak course of action was the more

acceptable to Pilate, as he would thus, by acknowledging the Tetrarch's jurisdiction, be able to patch up an old feud between them. Never was man more deceived than Pilate when he imagined that, by shirking his duty, he could succeed in warding off the condemnation of death of a man whom he knew and had declared to be innocent. Shirking duty, and shifting responsibility to others, cowardly shrinking from what ought to be done, never yet led to aught but failure, guilt and crime. The spiritual fibre of brave souls is made up of the courage to face difficulties and the determination to overcome obstacles and, cost what it may, to do what conscience dictates and duty commands.

A little over a mile north of the Prætorium was the palace of Herod. Here the wicked monarch was spending the days of the Passover, having come up from Galilee accompanied most likely by Herodias, his brother's wife and her daughter, Salome. This woman's hatred of the Baptist and her daughter's sensuous dance had, less than a year ago, brought the king to condemn to death our Lord's beloved Precursor.

"He sent Him away to Herod." Little did Pilate dream as he watched the procession

melt away to the north that morning and with a sigh of relief turned to other duties, that in less than two hours he would be once more face to face with his Prisoner, and, on account of this journey, he would then be less equal to do his duty and less able to free from the death penalty an innocent man, whom the Priests and Pharisees were determined to crucify before the set of sun.

Probably the Governor had paid Herod the compliment of sending a messenger to announce the coming of our Blessed Saviour, one of the king's subjects accused of crime by the Priests and rulers of the nation. This courtesy of Pilate and the news of the approach of our Lord were grateful tidings to the wicked Tetrarch. Holy Writ tells us: "And Herod seeing Jesus was very glad; for he was desirous for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to see some signs wrought by Him." No doubt the king in his palace at Tiberias by the Lake had often heard of the wonders which our Lord had wrought in his dominions. Galilee had witnessed our Blessed Saviour's wonderful miracles, and the acts of tenderness and love, which for three years had drawn to Him the hearts of the simple people. Doubtless the

lazy sensual monarch, lolling on the porches of his Galilean palace, overlooking the waters of Genesareth, had listened incredulously to the tales of the marvels wrought in the hills. Still these strange narratives had served to vary and relieve the dull monotony which must at times have weighed upon him. Naturally his coarse, vulgar curiosity had often been excited, and so he is pleased not only with the marked and flattering attentions of Pilate in sending the Prisoner, but also with the opportunity of testing by personal observation the skill of this magician at His tricks which had deceived so many of his credulous subjects.

The scene is not difficult to picture. The king, clothed in royal purple, was seated in state upon his throne; Herodias with her daughter was arrayed in garments of brilliant color and dye, woven from the richest cloth with eastern skill and fashioning. The court flatterers stood around gazing with admiring glances upon the sensual monarch, whose soul was dyed deeper by sin and guilt than his garments were by oriental pigments.

At length the doors were flung open and our Blessed Saviour, surrounded and followed by His enemies who crowded into the large hall, was led into the royal presence. Garbed in

the blood-dyed robe which His Mother had woven for Him long ago in the silent prayerful home at Nazareth, He stood silently in the great hall. All eyes were riveted upon Him. His sacred hands are tied behind His back, His head covered with a wealth of disheveled hair is slightly bent, and His dark eyes, so like His Mother's, are fixed upon the ground, as if He were, as He was in fact, absorbed in prayer and union with His Father.

"Herod seeing Jesus was very glad." This foul, sensual creature, whose jaded appetite needed the stimulation of novelty, rejoices at seeing our Blessed Saviour. His palace in Galilee had often been the resort of jugglers, actors, dancers and the like, and he had often wished that he could entice the Wonder-worker of Galilee from the hills into his presence for his entertainment and pleasure. Now his wish had been unexpectedly granted and luck had come his way. It never occurred to the guilty murderer of the Baptist that our Blessed Saviour was the warm friend of John. He never dreamed that, when John had reddened with his blood the marble pavement of the dungeons of Machærus, his death was his last and most eloquent testimony to the Man who stood silent and mute before him.

We cannot conceive how painful it must have been to our Lord to have been ushered into the presence of those partners in guilt, whom the Baptist had rebuked at the cost of his life. The hands of that guilty pair were red with the blood of the friend of the Bridegroom, who had so gladly decreased that his Master might increase. Yet silently and for love of us, He endured the indignity and the humiliation of the curious scrutiny from the eyes of that degenerate couple.

"He questioned Him in many words." Herod tried, perhaps by flattery, to enter into conversation with our Lord. Possibly he told Him how pleased he was that a man so distinguished for remarkable deeds should belong to his jurisdiction. It was an honor to the province of Galilee that one so well known should claim it as His native country. He may have assured his Prisoner of his willingness to help Him in any way in his power. Then accentuating the fact that he had already heard much of His marvelous skill and His miracles, he insinuated that he was quite ready to witness any display of power our Lord desired to manifest. He promised Him his protection; and insisted that He need have nothing to fear from the enemies who stood about ac-

cusing Him. Herod then fell back upon the couch of soft cushions and awaited in silence some answer from his Prisoner and some display of His skill in magic.

"But He answered him nothing."

Once more the King tried to persuade our Lord to satisfy his vulgar curiosity. He may have asked Him if He was the one at whose birth the Kings had come from the distant East at the beckoning of a star; he remembered hearing of that event from his aged father, who was much troubled at the time. He probably reminded our Lord that He was his Prisoner and in his power, and that His life or death was in his keeping, so it would be well for Him to comply with his request. He asked Him to display some of that strange ability which He had so often manifested among the hills of Galilee and along the Lake. Surely He would not be unwilling to do for His king, what he had so often done for his subjects, the common people in the up-country. Again he flung himself upon his couch and calling for some rich oriental wine refreshed himself while awaiting a reply. "But Jesus answered him nothing."

"But the chief priests and the Scribes stood by earnestly accusing Him." While

Herod plied our Lord with questions, His enemies were filled with fear lest He should find favor with the monarch. They listened in sullen silence, not daring to interrupt the king, but when they saw that the Prisoner would not answer and that the humiliated monarch was stung to anger by our Lord's failure to reply or even notice the proud, sensual ruler, then they were encouraged and "stood by accusing Him."

We may be sure that they left no stone unturned, no effort neglected, that could help toward their victim's undoing, and the success of their murderous design. They will emphasize our Lord's ambitions, which have already been laid before Pilate. This man is a friend of the Baptist, who has already justly paid the price of his crime by the sentence meted out to him by the royal mandate. Yet this man here had, while the Baptist was in prison, praised John before the whole people saying that the man whom his Majesty had condemned was greater than a prophet and that greater had not been born of woman.

"And Herod with his army set Him at naught: putting on Him a white garment, and sent Him back to Pilate." When interrogated by the High Priests our Lord answered con-

cerning Himself and His doctrine; when questioned by Pilate, He responded that His Kingdom was not of this world; but from the moment he appeared before Herod, He had not opened His mouth and was dumb. Our Blessed Saviour would not cast pearls before swine, and Herod's soul was in no condition for the saving words of the Divine Master. The foul king's mind was too darkened by sin, his soul too degraded by corruption, his will too weak by brutish self-indulgence to derive the least profit from any lessons the words of our Lord would have taught. So to the questioning, prompted by vain, vulgar curiosity, "He answered him nothing."

When Herod realized that no word of response could be drawn from his Prisoner, he pretended to despise Him as a weak impotent creature, clearly deceiving the simple people by magic, yet not knowing enough to plead His own cause or to take advantage of the opportunity of escaping from the hands of His enemies. So amid the scoffing and ridicule of the guard, the Priests and Pharisees, he clothed Him in the white garment of a fool and sent Him back to Pilate. Once more, as an innocent, harmless idiot, He would return to the Roman Governor. The king of Galilee,

while grateful to Pilate for acknowledging his jurisdiction, did not care to waste his time looking into the case of a foolish simpleton. He had more important matters to occupy his attention during the very busy week of the Passover in the Sacred City. The mutual compliments and the reciprocal courtesies of the Governor and King had patched up a friendship between them, "for before they were enemies, one to another."

Silently and prayerfully, surrounded by the hooting and mocking rabble, our Blessed Saviour made His way back to Pilate. The public streets were thronged with curious sight-seers and with vast throngs going to and from the Sacred Temple. From lip to lip the account went of the sport the people were having with the poor idiot who, like a plaything, was sent from the Governor to the Galilean king and back again.

What a lesson for us amid the little rebuffs and trifling humiliations which we encounter and which we find so hard to put up with! How keenly we feel a slight and how bitterly it is resented and how long remembered! How it rankles in our soul, giving birth to unkind judgments, hard words, at times even to uncharitable deeds! How easy

all would become, how sweet even, if we would keep this picture, upon which we have been meditating, before our minds, and often dwell upon it in our prayers and Holy Communions! If we could impress this scene of the humiliation and indignity meted out to our Lord upon our hearts, then earthly honors, earthly glory, would little by little grow distasteful to us and we would long to be clothed like the Master, who for our love was clothed with the white garment of a fool; to be clothed with His vesture of love, which to the world is folly, but to God, the highest wisdom.

THE DESPAIR OF THE TRAITOR

WE do not know at what precise moment in our Lord's Passion the last weird scene in Judas's dreadful crime took place, at what instant the unfortunate man, yielding to the waves of despair sweeping over his guilty soul, gave up the struggle and determined upon his own ruin. It may have happened while our Lord was before Herod or on His way back to Pilate. Events had, however, by that time sufficiently advanced to convince the faithless Apostle that any prospect of escape for the prisoner was hopeless. What the end would be was clear: Jesus would be condemned. Set of sun would find Him lifeless outside the walls of the city, and its slanting rays would light up the blood-stained body of the Master dead upon the cross.

Our Lord's condemnation Judas saw in the great throngs surging through the streets. He heard it in their strident cries for His blood, perceived it in the fierce looks upon their faces. From all sides he felt the evidence of his treachery, and there was no escape, no help, no hope. There was the blood of an in-

nocent man, a loved master, upon his soul, and "casting down the pieces of silver in the Temple, he departed; and went and hanged himself with a halter."

This story of Judas, while a sad one, and possibly among the keenest sufferings of our Lord's passion, if not the keenest, as some Saints have said, has its lesson for us. We shall, therefore, trace step by step, the various stages in the dread scenes of this awful tragedy.

Judas was from Judea, born, perhaps, down amid the sunny, vine-clad hills of Hebron, where David was anointed king, and where, perhaps, the Baptist was born. He may have been a child of winning ways whom his mother loved, and whom she brought many a time and oft to the Temple at the Passover-tide. When he had grown to manhood, happening to be in Galilee, he had witnessed the wonders wrought by the Galilean prophet among the hills and by the Lake. Such power and such kindliness, such strength and such tenderness, such love and such affection, he had never witnessed among the Priests whom he had seen in the Temple at the Holy City. Moved by zeal and affection for the new Prophet, he joined himself to the disciples and

cast in his lot with them. On that bright spring morning in the first year of our Lord's public ministry, when coming down from the mountain where He had spent the night in prayer, He picked out the Twelve for a closer companionship and Judas was one of the chosen ones.

We can be certain that that morning there was no thought of treachery, no determination of deceit, no purpose of disloyalty to his new Master, in the heart of Judas. He was probably more gifted than the others; he was from Judea, and had frequently been in the Holy City and at the Temple; he had mingled with the Priests, the Pharisees, and the Romans in the market place at the Joppa gate, and in the porches of the Temple on Mount Moriah. He had more experience in everyday affairs while his companions were simple fishermen, unacquainted with a life different from the simple customs and toil which filled up their days and nights fishing upon the Lake.

When our Lord picked Judas out that spring morning, his heart must have been touched with love and affection, and the crime that later proved his undoing was far from his thoughts. His ruin was no sudden storm, no

quick volcanic outburst of passion which swept him off his feet, but a gradual growth that blinded his mind, weakened his will and little by little rotted the healthy fibre of his spirit. The blindness of soul came on gradually, the weakness of will imperceptibly and his warm love cooled slowly and unsuspectingly till at length gripped by the vice of avarice he betrayed his Master for thirty pieces of silver.

Judas's fall was brought about through the indulgence of one inclination, one tendency, one passion, the passion of avarice. This vice grew, day by day, in his soul till its mastery was so strong, its grip so tight that for its gratification he did not hesitate to sell for the price of a common slave, the Master whom he had once loved.

Because of his experience, of his knowledge of affairs, our Lord had appointed him to the charge of the money contributed by pious souls for the support of the Apostles. Going up and down the country, preaching the Kingdom of God, provision for our Lord's and His Apostles' support was supplied by the charity of those who naturally, in this manner, wished to express their gratitude. Whatever was thus given was passed on to Judas, who was supposed to use it for the common

needs. There seems no doubt, that after a time the avaricious Apostle began to pilfer and appropriate to himself what belonged to all, and thus he began to feed fat the passion already sufficiently strong in his soul.

The day dawned when his greed for gold became so powerful that he was blinded to all else and sold his Master to satisfy his longing for money. Judas might never have betrayed our Lord if the strong appeal to his master passion had not found his soul ready to respond. When that appeal came, he would have been able to resist, had he not already enervated his spiritual life by previous indulgence in smaller matters. Thus confronted by great temptation, and finding himself too weak to cope with it, and its solicitation too strong, he yielded and with one wild leap plunged over the yawning abyss of despair.

Something similar can happen in any human life. To any man may come a crisis when in a moment he must make a decision upon which depends joy or sorrow, Heaven or hell. That decision, that choice, is determined by the whole past. His daily decisions between self-indulgence and duty, throughout the departed years, are really what fix his choice for weal or woe, at this all-important moment. So it

was with Judas. Little by little, day by day, act by act, avarice had gripped his soul by small frequent infidelities, so that when the trial came, when the test was applied, when the choice had to be made between money and the Master, he failed. He betrayed Christ and steeped his hands in His blood and stained his soul with the guilt of the murder of the Man-God. That last deed of treachery was prepared for by repeated acts of infidelity during the years of his ministry.

Let us study the final scene in this sad and painful catastrophe. On the eve of Palm Sunday, as He passed through Bethany, our Lord was entertained by Simon, the leper. Possibly Simon had been cured of the foul disease of leprosy by the healing touch of the Master, and so took this opportunity of showing his gratitude to his benefactor. Simon had been an outcast in the hills with a leathern thong over his lips, banished from the haunts of man and from those that he loved, forbidden even to drink from the stream that flowed by, and forced to cry out: "Unclean, unclean," at the sound of a human footstep. One day he saw the Master on the white road that wound through the hills, and rushing he fell at His feet, pleading that he might be made sound.

Gratitude was too deep in Simon's heart ever to allow him to forget that favor, and on Palm Sunday Eve, as our Lord was passing on to the Passover in the Sacred City, Simon manifested his thanks by entertaining our Lord at a banquet.

In the course of the feast "Mary took a pound of ointment of rich spikenard, of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, he that was to betray Him, said: 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?'" Here we have evidence of the power of avarice over the soul of the unfortunate and changed Apostle. Three years ago he would not have regarded as waste any manifestation of affection for his Master, however costly, but in those three years, Judas had sadly changed, the daily indulgence of his avarice had killed in his soul the love for Christ, and now he begrudged Him this expression of Mary's gratitude and love, even cloaking his objection under the hypocritical guise of charity. For St. John tells us: "He said this, not because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief and having the purse

carried the things that were put therein."

It was at this precise moment of weakness that the great temptation came to Judas, that the strong appeal was made to the master passion which was corroding his soul. Only a few weeks before our Lord had raised Lazarus from the dead, and no incident of recent years in the Sacred City was better known. This miracle was talked of in the porches of the Temple, in the market place at the Joppa gate, and in the streets. There was no one that had not heard of it, and so our Lord's popularity with the common people was enormously increased. Now at the time of the Passover which was at hand, the Galileans had come down from the up-country, and the report of the astounding miracle performed so recently on the dead Lazarus was naturally the first news that greeted them at their entrance to the city.

Our Lord was ever the idol of the Galileans and they, mingling with the common people, found an expression for their common enthusiasm in the outburst of loyalty that took place as they thronged on Palm Sunday morning to meet our Lord coming from Bethany to the Sacred City. The Priests saw the enthusiasm of the people, they heard the Hosan-

nas that were chanted that morning, and heard them with chagrin, envy and jealousy. They saw their influence lessening, their power decreasing and their hold upon the people slipping from their grasp. They saw, as they said themselves, that the whole world was following Him.

Judas, with his powers of observation sharpened by his greed for gold, was no stranger to the sentiments of jealousy and envy in the hearts of the Priests. He knew that they did not want Christ in the Sacred City at the Passover time. He was aware that they were bent upon His undoing before the sacred festivities began. This, then, was his opportunity, this was the appeal to his avarice, this was the great temptation. The hatred of the Priests for Christ was so great, their desire to be rid of Him so strong, and their determination not to have Him in the city at the Feast so fixed that they would make it worth Judas's while to betray Him. They would pay him richly for his treachery.

It is not hard to picture the unfortunate Apostle stealthily making his way over the Mount of Olives and entering into the sacred precincts of the Temple, and there haggling and bargaining with the Jews for the blood

of his Master until the contract was made. It was only on Good Friday morning that Judas realized the enormity of his crime, when our Lord was condemned to death. "Then Judas, who betrayed Him, seeing that He was condemned, repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief Priests and Ancients, saying: 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' But they said: 'What is that to us? Look thou to it.' And casting down the pieces of silver in the Temple, he departed and went and hanged himself with a halter." When stung by remorse Judas appealed to the Priests; the men who had pleaded with him to do the deed of blood, who had flattered him and fawned upon him, now sent him reeling back into the darkness, with no word of encouragement, no word of comfort, and, casting down the pieces of silver on the marble pavement of the sanctuary, the cry of despair in his own soul rang louder than the jingling of the silver coin upon the stone floor.

Now the end and two scenes start up before us. From the Prætorium, stumbling with the cross upon His bleeding shoulders, the betrayed Master makes His way to Mount Calvary, and there for three hours, whilst His

Mother stood at the foot of the cross, He hung between Heaven and earth, pleading for the soul of Judas. In the darkness of the eclipse, out from the eastern gate, his form bent, his forehead wrinkled, his eyes sunken in his head, with a halter round his arm, comes the despairing Judas. For a moment he looks to the north, looks towards Calvary, and then he turns sadly to the south, turns his back upon the Master hanging upon the cross, and stumbles out into the Hinnom valley, the Valley of Death, the valley where the graves have opened and the skulls are grinning as if in derision at him, and tying the rope round the limb of a juniper tree, with one wild cry of despondency, he flings himself outside the mercy of the dying Christ.

Judas's greatest sin was not the selling of his Master to the Priests and Pharisees, Judas's sin was the despair of the mercy of the Man whom he had betrayed. Had he but turned not to the south but to the north, and had he gone out the Damascus gate and about the skull-shaped hill of Mount Calvary, and crept up in the darkness and knelt beside the blue-mantled Mother and looked up into the face of the dying Christ, he would have been pardoned as the good thief was pardoned.

A MURDERER, OR THE LAMB OF GOD

ONCE more we take our stand amid the throng outside the Prætorium. Our Lord had been sent back by the Galilean Tetrarch to the Roman Governor, and now Pilate is a weaker man in the face of a fiercer struggle with the Priests and the people. No one has ever yet won a moral victory by shirking his duty and compromising his conscience and refusing to confront his obligation manfully.

Pilate vainly strove to shield his soul from judicial murder and to keep it free from the guilt of human blood. Possibly he fixed upon his line of conduct with our Lord's enemies, when he heard that the Prisoner had been remanded to him by Herod. He thought, while declaring our Lord's innocence, that he would meet the wishes of His enemies to some extent if he scourged our Blessed Saviour and then set Him free. The injustice of such a proceeding was evident. Still if it saved the prisoner's life, doubtless He ought to be grateful. Besides it would satisfy the hatred of those clamoring for His blood. Never was

a man so deceived. As well might he try to tame the wild beast by the taste of blood. This concession only whetted the appetite of Priests and people for the death of their apparently helpless Victim.

The Governor, having examined our Lord, found no cause in Him.

"No, nor Herod neither: for I sent you to him and behold, nothing worthy of death is done to Him. I will chastise Him, therefore, and release Him."

Let Pilate chastise Him; let the stinging whips once bite into that delicate Sacred Flesh; let the Precious Blood once flow out under the whiz of the lash; let the marble pavement of the Prætorium be once dyed red, and there is no power in the will of Rome's Governor that can satisfy the hatred of Christ's enemies and shield Him from a shameful death, before evening, on the cross.

We may with profit linger for a few moments on this act of injustice. Our Blessed Saviour is officially declared innocent and is then chastised. The Roman Governor before whom He was brought, pronounced Him guiltless of the charges levelled against Him, and then condemned Him to be whipped like a criminal and a slave. The imperial represen-

tative publicly announced that the charges were baseless, and yet condemned Him to endure the punishment of a common malefactor.

Yes, He was innocent. He was the only one of all the generations of men who could stand out on the white steps of Jerusalem's Temple and challenge His enemies to convict Him of sin, to prove Him guilty of any wrong-doing. Yes, He was innocent, for He was the Sinless One. Jeremias was sinless; John the Baptist was sinless, but their sinlessness was a favor granted them in their mothers' womb after their souls had been tainted by sin. They were cleansed from sin by an unspeakable grace before their birth. Mary, too, was unsullied and sinless. No shadow had ever darkened the radiant whiteness of her immaculate soul, but she was thus pure and untainted by a privilege to none other granted, in virtue of which the anticipated merits of today's blood-shedding were applied to her soul at the moment of her conception, and prevented that soul from ever being tarnished even by the slightest breath of original sin.

But our Blessed Saviour was innocent and sinless in a far fuller and far higher sense. He was sinless (though He bore the sins of us

all) not by favor, not by grace, but by nature and by right. His Sacred Humanity was united with the infinite all-white sanctity of the Godhead. He needed no privilege, no exemption. He could not have been otherwise than all-holy, all-sinless. In Him there could be no union of darkness and light. There could be no stain or blemish on the infinite innocence and holiness of the Godhead.

This chastisement then of our Lord, after His innocence had been proclaimed by the Governor, was a peculiar pain to His Sacred Heart. The injustice was so evident, and, as the event proved, so useless. We naturally recoil from innocence suffering. How painful it is to stand over the cradle of an innocent child and watch that child in the agony of death! How it smarts to see the cracked, parched lips, the fevered forehead, the pleading eyes, the slight swellings and fallings of the little breast, and yet be unable to bring relief! Innocence is so gentle, almost timid, so un-selfdefending. Innocence seems so helpless, so appealing. Yet Pilate declared Him innocent, and then sent Him to be cut and slashed by the whips wielded by the strong, brawny arms of the unfeeling, cruel soldiers.

"Why, what evil hath He done?" asked Pi-

late. The Roman Governor did not have the poor excuse of the envy and jealousy which stirred in the hearts of the Priests, and manifested itself in their clamoring for the blood of their victim from the court-yard of the Prætorium. They were blinded by hatred; they could not see because the guilty passions surging in their souls swayed their judgment. Not so Pilate. For he seemed to have almost a spiritual discernment of the innocence of his helpless Prisoner. He appeared to catch a glimpse of the sinlessness and spotlessness of his Victim. He even declared it by his question: "Why, what evil hath He done?" But he had not the courage to act up to the light that flooded his soul. The crowds filling the Prætorium, their anxious and distorted faces, their raised, clenched fists, the threats of the Priests, the wild cries of anger, the danger of a tumult in the streets, the clear prospect of waning influence in the Imperial City, all these tended to stifle his conscience, blur his vision and urge him on towards unwilling condemnation of an innocent man. Pilate determined, however, to make one more effort to save his prisoner.

It was the custom for the Roman Governor at the time of the Pasch to grant some criminal

pardon and freedom. Pilate, no doubt, thought that if the people were offered the liberation of a notorious murderer and robber, they would consent to allow this innocent and unoffensive man His freedom. The Priests, made keen by their jealousy and envy were not slow to turn this incident to their wicked purpose. The Governor then said to the people:

"Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas or Jesus that is called Christ?"

Before receiving an answer, St. Matthew states that Pilate was interrupted by a message from his wife:

"Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things in a dream because of Him."

This stay in the proceedings was the Priests' opportunity, of which they did not hesitate to avail themselves; for St. Matthew again says: "But the chief Priests and Ancients persuaded the people, that they should ask Barabbas, and make Jesus away." Our Lord's enemies were too alert not to make use of the interruption that took place after Pilate had asked the question. They saw that if the tide of popular favor could be turned towards Barabbas, the victory would be theirs and our Lord's doom

sealed. Thus the expedient adopted by Pilate for freeing his prisoner recoiled upon himself, and left him helpless before the clamoring and infuriated mob. If Pilate had but listened to the warning of his wife, if he had hearkened to those words from one solicitous that he should not do this unjust thing and evil deed, his soul would not have been stained with the guilt of blood. Was this message the last call and the final effort to drag him from the precipice towards which he was surely tending? At all events, the Governor seems not to have followed the injunction sent him by one eager to deter him from crime.

In the meantime, the Priests had not been idle. Possibly it was easy to win the favor of the people, for Barabbas while guilty of the crimes imputed to him had nevertheless, the Priests might urge, committed these crimes in trying to advance the political interests of the nation, and in endeavoring to take steps to render less strong and heavy the galling Roman yoke. It was not difficult for their ingenuity and hatred to devise reasons which had weight with the mob. When the Governor then offered the people the alternative, either Barabbas or Christ, urging them to select the latter on the ground that He was

innocent and that Herod had found no cause in Him, his plea for Christ was instantly rejected and the mob cried out for the liberation of Barabbas. To Pilate's question, bitter and sarcastic: "What shall I do with Jesus, that is called Christ?" surged back the awful cry: "Crucify Him, crucify Him." The Governor then flung into their teeth the question: "Why, what evil hath He done?" but to this there came back the same cry for blood: "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

Pilate, seeing that the day was lost, that the last expedient had failed, that nothing but blood could satisfy the mob, and fearing a tumult, desisted from further effort to save the life of a man whom he knew to be innocent, and had declared to be so. But what was the life of a worthless, unknown Jew compared to the unpopularity of a Roman Governor in the Imperial City, which could easily be brought about by further opposition to the Priests and the will of an unreasoning populace egged on by their leaders?

Our hearts go out to our Blessed Saviour in sympathy at the indignities during this scene of His sufferings. The cruelty and injustice of declaring that there was no cause in Him, and then subjecting Him before the

Priests and people to the humiliation of being set side by side in comparison with the common malefactor, stirs our hearts to deeper sympathy and keener pain.

How the words of the Roman Governor uttered to the fast gathering throngs that Good Friday noon, "Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas or Jesus?" sting us and bring the blush of indignation to our cheeks, when we think who our Lord was, the Eternal Son of God, the beloved of the Father and the Child of the Immaculate Mother! How we resent the insult! This man who is now rejected as a common murderer for three years had done nought but deeds of mercy and kindness. He had brightened the dark eyes of the sightless and opened the ears of the deaf to the sound of loved voices. His touch had cleansed the leper, had given strength to the halt and the paralytic. Even the dead, at His bidding, had risen from the grave and now in return for all this, He is set on a level with the man who had robbed the widow, the orphan and the poor; the man whose hands were stained with human blood, who if the law had had its way would have been crucified out there on Calvary long ago. This man, steeped in crime is dragged from his filthy

dungeon and preferred to the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Wild cries free this malefactor and clamors for innocent blood bring about the condemnation of Mary's loving Child. Yes, they chose Barabbas, and it was a terrible insult and an unspeakable crime.

But let us pause a moment. What about our choices in life? Have we not uttered in deeds, which speak louder than words, deeds that are trumpet-tongued, have we not uttered: "Not this man, but Barabbas, crucify Him, crucify Him"? Had the man or the woman who neglects Holy Mass on Sunday, who lies abed reading the Sunday paper and fails in the duty incumbent upon all under penalty of sin, been outside the Prætorium on that Good Friday, he or she would have echoed the cry of the Jews: "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Such people prefer their sloth to the will of the Master who died for them. The parents who send their children to so-called fashionable schools, thus compromising their faith and often co-operating in having the faith stolen from their young hearts, such are teaching their children to cry out in later years: "Let Him be crucified!" They will not do it, of course, in so many

words, that would be deemed vulgar, whereas it is really blasphemy; but they will do it by their lives, by their minimizing of a faith they never really learned and loved. They will do it by mixed marriages, which will weaken a faith that at best was never robust, but always anemic.

Protracted absence from Holy Communion, because an illicit passion will not be given up or sacrificed, is a louder "Crucify Him, crucify Him" than that which rang out on that Good Friday, in the Prætorium of Pilate. The man who spends his wages in the saloon on Saturday night, and allows the wife and children to suffer, that man cries out in his life, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." The employers who pay starvation wages and defraud the laborer of that which is rightly his, commit the sin which cries out to Heaven for vengeance; they too cry out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." The woman who darkens her home, ruins her husband's peace of mind and her family's happiness by her extravagance and waste and love of fashion, by her neglect of the duties of the fireside, that woman prefers Barabbas to Christ.

Let us then turn some of our indignation away from the Jewish rabble and the howl-

ing mob of Good Friday upon our own lives, upon our own choices, and upon our own purposes. Let us see that our lives are so lived that, had we been in that throng on Good Friday, we would have been found with those who sympathized with our suffering Master; let us so act that we would have been found with our Blessed Saviour, and not with those who shouted for His Blood.

THE AWFUL CURSE

THE efforts of the Governor to save our Blessed Saviour proved unavailing, and he was finally forced to yield to the clamors of the mob, urged on by their Priests and the Ancients. "And Pilate seeing that he prevailed nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, taking water washed his hands before the people, saying: 'I am innocent of the Blood of this just Man, look you to it.' And the whole people answering said: 'His Blood be upon us and upon our children!' "

Had Pilate from the start determined to handle the case submitted to him on the principles of justice and not upon those of expediency, the enemies of our Lord would not have won the day. Had he taken a firm attitude making it clear that nothing would have any weight with him but the truth, had he set aside a course of policy which was willing to sacrifice the life of an innocent man to motives of political expediency, and had he threatened the rabble with the sword as had often been done by Roman Governors before, the issue of the appeal to him would have been

quite different from that narrated in the Gospel pages. Following a policy of compromise, with his thoughts fixed upon his status in Rome, and the fear of a tumult among the people, he was no match for the stubbornness of the mob, urged on by their unscrupulous leaders. At last he unwillingly yielded to their clamorings, and sitting down pretended to wipe from his soul by a useless ceremony the guilt of a judicial murder for which he was soon to be responsible.

No water could wash away that guilt. All the water in earth's great oceans could not purify the stained soul of Rome's representative. The crime about to be committed could be cleansed away only by the Blood for the shedding of which before the sun is half way down the slope of the sky Pilate must answer. This childish, unmeaning ceremony he performed in the sight of the whole multitude and under the eyes of our Blessed Saviour. Our Lord looked on quietly and silently. His eyes rested upon the Governor, then upon the Priests, and lastly upon the impatient, threatening mob. In those meek, dark eyes there was no anger, no reproachfulness, but a gentle look of unceasing, unaccusing love.

To Pilate's protest of innocence there came back a wild cry from the Jews. "The whole people answering said: 'His Blood be upon us, and upon our children!'" They had seen His garments stained with blood and like wild beasts thirsted for it. It was a universal cry, which born in the hearts of the mob lived on the lips of the "whole people," and echoed through the colonnades and precincts of the Temple on Mount Moriah. That cry not of Scribe, Ancient, Priest, Pharisee, Sanhedrin, but of the "whole people" struck the slopes of Olivet, re-echoed through the streets of the city and died away among the tombs and graves of the Hinnom valley to the south.

"His Blood be upon us!" was wild, thrilling, unanimous. It was like the cry of those who fled from the rising waters of the Flood and perished in the Deluge. It was like the shriek of terror and despair from the lips of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah when the fire from Heaven licked up the cities of the plain. It was like the wail of despair that goes up from the victims of a sinking ship at sea. Then silence fell upon the mob, a silence which brooded over them as the quiet which hung over Egypt at midnight before God's angel flew in the darkness over the land of

the Nile, shedding the blood of the firstborn.

Through it all what anguish there was in the Heart of the uncomplaining Saviour! How could anguish so bitter and grief so deep be so beautiful! He was silent, for He would not sentence or condemn them. By that cry they had sentenced and condemned themselves. But a few days ago when He wept from the mountain-top over the ill-fated city He had thought of this hour of pain. His Heart went out to that mob with depths of infinite love.

Yet that awful cry caused an unutterable pain to the Sacred Heart. All sin pains and smites that sinless Heart. It is infinitely sensitive to the slightest stain or blemish, and this cry on Good Friday, "His Blood be upon us and upon our children!" was an immense sin, gigantic in its ingratitude, and it surged in relentlessly upon the sensitive soul of our Saviour with overwhelming force. The crashing of the wind and storm-swept ocean against unshaken cliffs is like the caress of a mother to a sleeping, sick child, compared to the force and overwhelming strength of the crashing of that sin of ingratitude upon the gentle spirit of our suffering Saviour.

Think of the vision which must have flashed before the mind of our Saviour. How He

loved His people! He had led them out of Egypt and fed them for forty years in the desert. He had gone before them in a cloud of smoke by day and through the dark night in a pillar of fire. He had led them on and guided their footsteps. He had brought them into the Land of Promise, a land flowing with milk and honey. He had said to them: "Ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and ye men of Juda, judge between Me and My vineyard. What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard that I have not done to it?" And now this people whom He had loved, whom He had watched as a mother watches her child, this people rejects Him, and calls down a curse upon themselves and upon their children.

In the past they had wandered in the wilderness, but He had led them on. Today they cast Him off. They will not have that Man reign over them, and in the future they will wander over the earth homeless and outcast, a people without a sanctuary. Down through the years He can see them solitary and lonesome, with the effect of this curse upon them. Wanderers from land to land and from century to century they bear it with them wherever they go, and its weight seems to press upon them and upon their children.

Did He also think of the unworthy Communions and the sacrilegious profanations of His Precious Blood when that Blood would become not a blessing, but a curse? He loved His Sacred Blood so tenderly. The very last drop of it would in a few hours trickle down His side from His Sacred Heart. Into ten thousand chalices it was to flow, but when it is received in sin in the hearts of men the pain in the Sacred Heart is ten thousand times keener and deeper than that which smote Him when the "whole people" cried out, "His Blood be upon us and upon our children!"

Did Mary in the quiet of the Cenacle hear that curse? If so, with what surprise! It was such an incredible wonder to her that these people did not love Him. How could they help loving Him! He was so beautiful and amiable. That dear Mother had many sorrows since the shadows fell last night over Jerusalem, but none which pierced and stabbed her soul so cruelly. Others more cruel and greater awaited her before the set of sun.

But that wild cry was also a source of joy to the Heart of our Blessed Saviour, who thirsted we know to lay down His life on Mount Calvary at the ninth hour. On that holy mount and at that hour He was to pay

in full the price of our redemption and blot out the handwriting against us. This calling down of His Blood upon them removed the last obstacle that stood in the way of His Sacred Passion. It was the last attack upon Pilate's resistance and under it he broke and gave way. It showed the Governor that all further parley was useless, and so his opposition ceased and he prepared to give sentence. To our Lord thirsting to shed His Blood for us it was then a source of comfort that now He could run his course like a giant, and testify by His death His love for man. Just as a generous soul rejoices in the wealth and abundance he has to give away, so our Lord was glad that the last obstacle to the giving up of His life and the shedding of His Blood for our sakes had been set aside.

He was glad, because that curse was for all time to be changed into a blessing, a prayer ascending unto the throne of the Father. Henceforth two prayers would go up like fragrant incense from the heart of man to the Heart of God. One, the Lord's Prayer, He taught long ago with His own Divine lips on a hill in Galilee. It was near the Lake redolent with so many sacred memories that He spoke for the first time those sacred words,

when the people thronged out from the lake-shores, towns and villages and asked Him to teach them to pray. In a voice sweeter than a mother's, humming her child to sleep, He said: "When you pray, thus shall you pray; 'Our Father who art in Heaven.';" and on that day He taught the prayer which has strengthened and consoled millions of hearts and which shall live on through the life of the Church till the end.

The second prayer is that hoarse, wild malediction, that awful cry which the "whole people" in their drunken frenzy of hate uttered that first Good Friday in the streets of the Sacred City. That curse has been changed into a blessing, that blasphemy to a worship and a prayer. On down through all the ages, at every hour, every day and every night, over the whole earth from countless human hearts that cry has gone out pleadingly to the throne of God. It is no longer a cry of hatred, no longer a savage yell for the spilling of human blood, but it is the eloquent plea of Christian faith, the expression of unshaken confidence in the power of the Precious Blood for the redemption of mankind. It is a humble petition that the Precious Blood may not have been shed in vain.

Long years ago when the Israelites were about to leave Egypt they were bidden by God to kill a lamb and mark their door-posts with its blood. In virtue of this marking of their doors with the blood of a lamb God promised to spare them. "I will pass through the land of Egypt that night and will kill every firstborn in the land of Egypt. . . . The blood shall be unto you for a sign in the houses where you shall be. And I shall see the blood and shall pass over you; and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you when I shall strike the land of Egypt." "And the children of the Israelites going forth did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, and it came to pass at midnight the Lord slew their firstborn in the land of Egypt from the firstborn of Pharao who sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive woman that was in the prison, and all the firstborn of the cattle. And Pharao arose in the night and all his servants and all Egypt; and there arose a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house wherein there lay not one dead."

Such was the favor God granted to the blood of the Paschal lamb in the Old Dispensation; but that blood was only a type, a figure of the Blood of the Lamb slain from

the beginning of the world, and shed on Mount Calvary on Good Friday. If the shadow in Egypt had such efficacy what must be the power of the Son of God poured out in the New Dispensation, poured out on the cross, poured out daily in the chalice from the rising to the setting of the sun on more than ten thousand altars? St. Paul tells us very emphatically of this power when he writes to the Hebrews: "For if the blood of goats and of oxen and the ashes of a heifer being sprinkled sanctify such as are defiled, to the cleansing of the flesh, how much more shall the Blood of Christ, who by the Holy Ghost offered Himself unspotted unto God, cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?"

In the supper chamber on the last night of His life, when His Apostles were gathered around Him for the last time and His spirit was saddened by the betrayal of Judas and the dark vision of the morrow, "taking the chalice He gave thanks and gave to them saying: 'Drink ye all of this, for this is My Blood of the New Testament which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sin.'" Here our Blessed Saviour poured out the Precious Blood into the chalice before that wild

cry clamoring for His death rang through Jerusalem's streets. Before that awful cry was uttered and before He hung for three hours bleeding His life away so great was His love, so ardent His longing to testify that love for us that He devised this miracle of His affection to forestall the clamors of His enemies and to anticipate His murderers' designs. He bids us drink of that chalice for the remission of sins, bids us approach the Holy Table for our cleansing and our strengthening. He told us earlier in His life, on the shore of the Lake, that unless we drank His Blood we should not have life within our souls. This then is His dying wish and testament, His last request, a plea made to us as the shadows of death on Calvary are thickening over Him, that we should love Him and serve Him faithfully, and having parted company with sin and its allurements kneel down before His altar morning after morning and drink His Precious Blood.

THE VICTIM BLEEDS

THE wild cry, "His Blood be upon us and upon our children!" died away against the slopes of Olivet and amid the colonnades of the Temple, and with it died in Pilate's soul his opposition to the demands of the Priests and the clamors of the mob. "So Pilate, being willing to satisfy the people, released to them Barabbas, and delivered up Jesus, when he had scourged Him, to be crucified."

Barabbas was no longer a criminal. The shackles and manacles were stricken from his limbs and he walked the streets of Jerusalem once more a free man. The people had made their choice, and in doing so, as the Prophet said, chose two evils. "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." Since that day and that choice this people has wandered from land to land, and from century to century away from the fountains of living water.

Although Pilate had not yet pronounced formal judgment and final sentence of con-

demnation and death our Lord was, however, handed over to the soldiers to be scourged, as St. John tells us: "Then, therefore, Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.'

Scourging was a chastisement prescribed under certain conditions by the law of Moses. It was commanded in the Old Dispensation by the judges that "if they see that the offender be worthy of stripes they shall lay him down and shall cause him to be beaten before them. According to the measure of the sin shall the measure also of the stripes be, yet so that they exceed not the number of forty lest thy brother depart shamefully torn before thy eyes." According to the Jewish Law the number of stripes was limited so that they could not exceed forty, and St. Paul tells us that He was scourged five times, and always with the greatest severity allowed by the Law, having endured at each scourging forty lashes less one. The Romans in the infliction of this shameful punishment were not restricted to any definite number of blows. Frequently criminals and slaves were sentenced to be scourged to death.

The instrument of torture employed in the scourging of our Blessed Saviour was probably the *flagellum,* a whip of several knotted

lashes. Of the various instruments used in this torture the *flagellum* was the severest. This wielded by the strong arms of the rough, coarse soldiers, anxious to curry favor with the Governor and the Priests, doubtless inflicted the most agonizing torture. Pilate had the hope that the horror of the scourging and its pitiable effects upon its Victim might move the people to desist from their ferocious clamor for our Lord's death. As well might one expect to tame wild beasts by the sight of blood. The knowledge of this hope may have lent strength to the brawny arms of the soldiers wielding the blood-soaked lashes.

This scene of humiliation and cruelty is passed over rapidly, and in a few words by the Evangelists: "Then, therefore, Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him." Our Blessed Saviour was first almost entirely stripped of His garments, then bound to a low column, with His head and back bent so that the skin was taut, and the position convenient for the blows of the torturers. The scourging was one of the awful details of our Lord's bitter Passion which during His mortal life seems to have flung its dark shadows over His tranquil soul. "The Son of Man shall be betrayed, mocked, spit upon, scourged and crucified."

All through His life the vision of this painful hour was before Him and occupied His thoughts. His Prophets in the Old Law saw it as they looked down through the coming years and pictured His agony. "I am prepared for scourges and My sorrow is always before Me."

All contemplatives are agreed that the scourging was most severe, cruel and prolonged. Some even say that blood-money had been distributed among the soldiers to induce them not to spare their victim any detail of suffering or any circumstance of agony which ingenious cruelty could inflict. Then, too, as already hinted, the soldiers knew, doubtless, of the Governor's desire to free the Prisoner whom he had declared innocent. Pilate at first hoped to bring about this release when he sent our Lord to Herod, but in this he failed. Then he had recourse to the humiliating and degrading comparison and competition with Barabbas. This also failed.

The scourging then is his last resource, his last effort, his last card in the game that he is playing in his weakness to shield his soul from the guilt of judicial murder. If this fails, all is lost. He will then have either to condemn to death an innocent and guiltless

man or set at defiance the Jewish authorities. This last he is not brave enough to do. The Jews have resolved upon the death of their Victim, and Pilate knows full well it is too late to put himself in opposition to the Ancients and the Priests, for they could and would rouse the unreasoning mob to violence and sedition in the Sacred City, and then, instead of being a favorite in Rome, he would feel the vengeance of the imperial authority.

His last scheme, therefore, was to scourge his Victim so cruelly that the very sight of Him and His agony would rouse the people to sentiments of pity and compassion. St. Augustine takes this view when he says: "Pilate did this we may believe with no other view save that the Jews might be satiated with His torments, and think enough had been done, and no longer rage for His death." To our Blessed Saviour, then, enduring this unspeakable torture we can apply the words of Isaias: "From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head there is no soundness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores. They are not bound up nor dressed nor fomented with oil."

Pilate's hope to appease the desire of the Jews for blood was vain. Their appetite was

whetted the more by the sight and the sound of the hissing lashes. The Precious Blood reddening the marble pavement of the Prætorium only strengthened their determination to shed its last drop on Mount Calvary before the evening shadows crept over the city. This horrible torture left our Lord's Body in the most pitiable condition. Bound to the low pillar, He was cut and bruised and mangled under the numberless blows administered by the savage and unfeeling soldiers, eager to carry out the wishes of the Governor, and urged on in their bloody work by the promptings of the Priests and people. True, indeed, were the words of the Prophet, who centuries before saw in vision this scene of sorrow and of pain. "There is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness . . . and His look as it were hidden and despised. . . . We have thought Him, as it were, a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted." Surely He was never more beautiful, never more comely in our eyes, never dearer to our hearts than He is in this scene. He was beautiful beyond the sons of men preaching on the Galilean hills or by the Lake; He was winsome and attractive, as a Babe of Bethlehem or as a Boy of Nazareth, but he was never so attractive, never so lov-

able as He is standing by the pillar, meekly enduring the thousand burning stripes from biting lashes as they fall heavily upon His Sacred Body.

Whatever may have been the designs of the Roman Governor, whatever may have been the hate of His enemies, Priests and people, it was not the will of the Heavenly Father that His Son should die under the scourge. All the pain, bruises and cutting that the lash can inflict He willingly endures, but He is not to die bound to a pillar in the Prætorium of Pilate. His sacrifice is to be consummated, His death accomplished only at the ninth hour, hanging between heaven and earth outside the city wall on Mount Calvary, in the sight of His own people who had clamored for His Blood.

Pilate had said openly: "I will chastise Him and let Him go." Abundantly has the first part of that promise been fulfilled. Never had a slave been torn or cut more unmercifully; but Pilate will never let Him go. The wild cries, "Crucify Him, crucify Him" from the ignorant rabble and the Priests will break down the last barrier of the Governor's resistance, and he will give sentence of death.

Why, we may ask, did our Lord suffer so

intensely, shed His Blood so profusely in such an excess of pain and agony? It was prescribed in the Old Law: "According to the measure of the sin shall the measure also of the stripes be." On the stainless soul of the Immaculate Lamb of God there could be no sin. He was all sinless, without taint or blemish. There could be in Him no union of darkness with light. His human nature was substantially united with the infinite sanctity of the Godhead. He had from the steps of the Temple challenged His enemies to convict Him of sin, and that challenge had remained unanswered. Yet while He has not and would not have any touch of personal sin, still "the Lord put upon Him the iniquities of us all." The innocent Lamb of God was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises we are healed. As our sins are beyond the counting and above measure, so also was the measure of the stripes received in the Prætorium of Pilate by the innocent Victim who bore our iniquities.

It is true that any least thought, word or deed, any tear, any sigh, any single drop of His Blood would have sufficed to appease the anger of His Father for the sins of countless

worlds; but what would have satisfied God's justice in dealing with a fallen race would not satisfy the great love that burned in the Sacred Heart for each one of us. "He loved me and delivered Himself up for me." Here we have the explanation of the "measure" of the stripes," and the excess of the sufferings due not to the hatred of the Jews or the cruelty of the unfeeling soldiers or the weakness of a Roman Governor, but to the unfathomable ocean of love in the Heart of our Blessed Saviour.

One more suggestion. The sins of sensuality so uncounted and so gross, to which man is inclined and in which he has ever indulged clamored for reparation. The concupiscence not only of the eyes, but especially of the flesh, had outraged from the beginning the Divine Majesty "for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon earth"; even the Flood and the destruction of the cities of the Plain have been powerless to stem the tide of sensuality. In this struggle fire could no more prevail than water. Our Blessed Saviour then, to teach us to conquer our grosser nature, to win us away from sensual and lower tendencies and inclinations and to allure us to the practice of mortification, was chastised in His own Flesh and shed

His own Blood copiously for our example and our strengthening. His Sacred Flesh writhed and agonized under the lash, was bruised and torn by cruel blows that we might struggle manfully against the tyranny of the flesh and be its masters and not its slaves.

Alas, how comfort-loving and how sensual and even sinful we are! How we dread discomfort and inconvenience, and how tactfully we shirk what is disagreeable to our senses! How little penance and mortification there is about us! No wonder our spiritual lives are feeble, and lack the vigor and ruggedness which flourish in souls only by conquest of self and the practice of penance.

THE VICTIM CROWNED

THE whizzing of the lashes was silent at last and the cruel scourging ended; but no pitying eye rested on that poor blood-stained Victim, and no strong arms were lifted to support Him in His weakness. Mary was not there to staunch with loving touch the flowing of the Blood and to whisper a word of comfort to her agonizing Son. "Then the soldiers of the Governor, taking Jesus into the hall, gathered together unto Him the whole band, and stripping Him, they put a scarlet cloak about Him. And platting a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand, and bowing the knee before Him, they mocked Him, saying: 'Hail, King of the Jews.' And spitting upon Him, they took the reed and struck His head." Such is the description left us by St. Matthew of the next scene in the awful tragedy of our Saviour's passion. When the scourging was over the appetite of the rough unfeeling soldiers was whetted for more cruelties and indignities for their helpless Prisoner. They led Him into the barrack-yard of the palace and urged by

the evil spirit, by the promptings of the Priests, by their desire to win favor with the Governor, and by their own coarse natures, they proceeded to the carrying out of the details pictured by the Evangelist.

A week previously our Lord had distinctly said that He would be delivered to the Gentiles to be mocked. The Jewish Priests and their servants had fulfilled this prophecy to the letter. They had made a plaything of the Man-God in the palaces of the Priests. Now the Gentiles are to have their hour of amusement and holiday at our Blessed Saviour's expense. Again they strip Him of His garments and all the agony of His wounds is renewed. The flesh quivers, the wounds smart and once more the Precious Blood flows down on the pavement; but this suffering was slight compared to the pain inflicted upon the Sacred Heart from the rude violation of His unspeakable sense of delicacy and modesty.

Upon His bleeding shoulders they flung in derision the ragged cast-off purple cloak of a soldier; anything was good enough if it would serve as a source of ridicule to His royal pretensions. The broken base of a column will do for a throne upon which for a pastime they enthrone their King. A reed is thrust

between His bound hands and then twining a crown of sharp thorns, they placed it upon His sacred head. After this wild orgy of cruelty, "they began to salute Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews.' And they struck His head with a reed and they did spit on Him, and bending knees, they adored Him."

How terrible this drama of pain and humiliation! How fruitful of salutary lessons for us! It was fitting that on that day a crown should have been placed upon our Lord's head. Kings are anointed and crowned and was not Christ the King of Kings? Did holy Anna, when she chanted her Canticle in Silo, see in spirit this coronation, as she sang of the Messias, "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth, and He shall give empire to His king, and shall exalt the horn of His Christ"? Our Blessed Saviour was King by divine right from the eternal years, and today He is anointed in His Blood and crowned King over the hearts of men.

When Samuel anointed Saul king in Rama, he said to all the people: "Surely you see there is none like him, whom the Lord has chosen, and the people cried out, 'God save the king'." But on the day of our Lord's crowning, there is no voice raised to proclaim

Him truly King. Seated on the broken pillar with the thorns piercing His Sacred Head, and with a reed in His hand, He is an object of derision to His enemies. Yet St. Paul, quoting the Psalmist, says of Him, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, a sceptre of Juda is the sceptre of Thy Kingdom." Yet at that hour in the midst of His enemies, no lips moved to say, "God save the King."

In Gihon, outside the walls of Jerusalem, Solomon was made king of Israel, for we read "Sadoc, the priest and Nathan the prophet, have anointed him king of Gihon; and they have gone from thence rejoicing so that the city rang again" with shouts of triumph and welcome to the king. How different the anointing of the Solomon of the New Law! No priest with consecrated hand poured oil upon His sacred head as the Blood trickled down from the thorn-pierced wounds. The only joy that day was in the hearts of His enemies, the Priests, Ancients and people, who were glad that He did not reign over Israel and that His regal pretensions were at an end. They mocked and scorned Him at His coronation, and they crowned Him not with the golden diadem, but with a crown of thorns which had grown in their own and our sinful hearts.

It was fitting that He should be crowned, for conquerors are crowned. When the Roman generals came home with their trophies and their captives, they were crowned by a grateful people. In the honors of their crowning, in the hour of their triumph, amid the plaudits and huzzas of their reception, they forgot the labors, fatigues and dangers of their struggles and wore in pride the fillet of victory twined about their heads. On that day our Lord was a conqueror. No conquest in the history of the world is comparable to His at the hour of His humiliation.

When King David was anointed in Hebron, he became king over all Israel and went forth with his troops to conquer the City of Sion. "The Ancients also of Israel came to the king in Hebron, and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David to be king over Israel." After his anointing, he went forth against the Jebusites, stormed and took the Sacred City and secured the castle of Sion. He went on prospering and growing more powerful; the Lord God of Hosts was with him and victory was marked upon his standard.

Today our Lord, after His crowning, is the victor over His great enemy, pride of life.

The sight of that thorn-crowned bleeding head was to invigorate uncounted souls through the centuries in their struggle against pride, vanity and ambition. Kneeling in spirit in that barrack-yard, listening to the mockery and derision of His enemies unnumbered brave men and women have cried out: "Vain pomp and glory of the world, I hate you." Looking up at that Divine suffering Face, they said to Him: "Thou art the glory of Jerusalem; the hand of the Lord has strengthened Thee and Thou shalt be blessed forever. On that Good Friday men bent the knee before Thee in mockery, but at Thy name, down all the ages, every knee on earth, in heaven and hell shall bend." Was there ever such a conquest in the world's history? Was there ever such a conqueror, so fittingly crowned?

Of old victims were crowned and decked out for the sacrifice, and had to be spotless and without blemish. Nothing soiled or tarnished could be crowned and offered upon the altar. On Good Friday, before the Great Sacrifice consummated at the ninth hour, the Divine Victim, who was also the High Priest, was crowned and prepared. Surely He was without blemish for He was "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world."

Upon His bleeding shoulders rested the iniquities of us all, and He bore all our sins. Every wound and hurt upon Him was of our doing; He was offered up for our healing, because He willed it. So with laughter and cruel jibe, they crowned Him on the day of His espousals with our souls. On that day with the crown of thorns upon His head, He became our High Priest offering Himself in the only sacrifice which could be pleasing to the Father, and in atonement for sin. Every pain was suffered, every agony endured, every humiliation embraced, every indignity gladly borne, all was willingly accepted for our love. St. Paul makes this clear when he says: "Christ did not glorify Himself, that He might be made a High Priest, but He that said unto Him: 'Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee;' and He said also in another place, 'Thou art a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech,' who in the days of the flesh, with a strong cry and tears, offering up prayers and supplications to Him who was able to save Him from death, was heard for His reverence, and whereas indeed He was the Son of God, He learned obedience of the things which He suffered. And, being consummated, He became to all that obey Him,

the cause of eternal salvation, called by God, a High Priest, according to the order of Melchisedech."

So prostrate in spirit in the barrack-yard, amid the rough and heartless soldiers, making a pastime of the suffering of the Eternal Son of God, we can look upon Him whom we have pierced, our King, our Conqueror and Priestly Victim, and see on His head the diadem wherewith we have crowned Him in the day of His espousals.

Shall we learn the lesson so needed by us all, shall we still allow pride to rule our lives? He was innocent, we are guilty. "What evil hath He done?" Pilate had asked and nought of sin could be cast in His face. What answer could we make, were the question asked of us? They compared Him with Barabbas, and yet how many Barabbases we have preferred to Him?

See Him now, cut and bleeding with the soiled, purple cloak upon His smarting shoulders, the reed in His Hand and the crown on His Head. There are none to comfort Him. The priests plot for His death; His Apostles abandon Him; the people clamor for His Blood; Judas, one of the Twelve, has betrayed Him. Shall we refuse His pleading and deny

Him our heart's love and our life's service? Years have gone by, one by one. We have looked for peace and joy elsewhere and not found them. Through every day of each of those dead years, He has urged and begged and prayed and entreated us to acknowledge Him as our King, yet we have put Him off and would not. Shall we not let Him now conquer our hearts and reign truly over our lives? Life is hurrying away and we have less time to give. Delay is always dangerous; surely we do not want to fling into His Sacred Face the dregs of ill-spent years. There can be no peace, rest, brightness in all our remaining years, outside of His love. We shall find His service a joy that is more than a match for every sorrow, a strength above every weakness, a courage that downs any cowardice, a reward in itself towering far above any sacrifice; and so, we shall bow the knee today and say, "Hail to our thorn-crowned King," and at length give Him our poor, tired, weary hearts, and He will reign over them.

THE VICTIM CHOSEN

SOME knowledge of the cruelties, perpetrated in the barrack-yard on their Prisoner, must have reached the expectant throng without. Possibly echoes of the ribald laughter and jeering mockery may have reached the fringe of the waiting multitude. Pilate had given the soldiers a free hand in their treatment of the helpless Victim in their fiendish sport, so that our Lord, being reduced to a most pitiable spectacle, His appearance might move the hearts of His enemies to forgiveness. But the wild cry that in a few moments went up for His blood, like the cry of a wounded, frightened beast in the forest at night, soon killed all hope in the heart of the Governor.

The hum and buzz of the voices suddenly ceased; tense silence hung over the vast crowd; the people pushed forward, stretching their necks, looking between or over the heads of those in front of them. Their curiosity had been aroused. They were eager to see the Prisoner who had been absent for a time. Surely He was a strange sight. They had never before seen a man crowned with thorns.

The soiled purple mantle does not hide the ghastly wounds which bleed afresh as He walks slowly leaving a trail of blood on the marble pavement. His Sacred Face covered with dust and spittle, is marred by bruises and cuts. His step is slow and halting in His approach towards Pilate. Now, indeed, enmity will be disarmed and worldly fears allayed. Such an object of ruthless cruelty and injustice will move the populace to a revolution of feeling in His favor. Never was a man more deceived as to the sentiments of a mob, and the Governor soon found out that his calculations had sadly miscarried.

"Pilate, therefore, went forth again, and said to them, 'Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that you may know, I find no cause in Him.' So Jesus came forth, bearing the crown of thorns, and the purple garment. And he said to them: 'Behold the Man.'" Pilate was elated and full of hope, sure of the success of his scheme. He surveyed with bright eyes and smiling glance the silent, expectant throng. And in a loud voice he said to them: "Behold the Man. Here is the Man you feared so much, here is the man whom you regarded as the destroyer of your sacred customs and traditions, who forbade tribute to Cæsar, the

leader who was to drive the Roman legions from your land and restore the kingdom of Israel, look upon Him and see how the Roman authorities have dealt with Him and His pretensions." He then smilingly and confidently paused for a reply.

All for a moment was silent, as calm as a forest at quiet midnight. It was the lull before the storm, the calm before the earthquake. The first who saw our Lord in His pitiable condition were His relentless and remorseless enemies, and these could be moved to mercy and tenderness by no power in the tongue of man, by no cruelty, by no injustice, however great, inflicted on their hated Victim. "When the chief Priests, therefore, and the Ancients had seen Him, they cried out, saying: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!'" The sight of our Blessed Saviour, far from appeasing their lust for vengeance and for blood, only incited them to greater fury and louder clamor for His death.

"Behold the Man." When the children of Israel murmured against Moses in the desert "the Lord sent among the people fiery serpents, which bit them and killed many of them." Moses, however, through the mercy of God, came to their relief. "He, therefore,

made a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign; which when they that were bitten looked upon, they were healed." Likewise at that most sacrilegious hour in the Prætorium, God permitted Pilate to urge the people to "behold the Man," but inflamed by hatred, blinded by passion, urged on by their Priests, the people looked up and heeded not. If they had beheld the Man-God with eyes of faith and trust instead of shrieking and yelling for His blood, instead of shouting in anger, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" they would have fallen on their knees in repentant worship and love. God's pardon and grace would have enveloped them.

In the days of King Assuerus it was death to go into the royal presence unless summoned. Queen Esther in spite of this risked her life and looked unbidden upon the King's countenance and her prayer was granted. In our lives we need have no fear to "behold the Man," our King. We require no command to look up into the face of our suffering Saviour. Indeed did we raise our eyes to that terrible and blood-stained countenance often, our petitions would be granted and our prayers heard. Were we more frequently to "behold the Man," and look upon Him whom we have

pierced, "who is the chastisement of our peace," we should learn to love Him daily more and more. Our weak, timid souls would be stronger and braver and our hearts stouter for the doing of His will.

"Behold the Man!" Look up at that divine Face with love as Mary looked upon it. To the Priests and Jews, on that day, there was no beauty or comeliness in it, yet God's angels looked upon it in awe and reverence. To Mary, it was more beautiful now in its disfigurement than when she first pressed His childish Face to her bosom at Bethlehem or saw it lit up in awe and prayer with the radiance of the Godhead during the silent years of Nazareth.

The face is the mirror of the soul. It reflects in line and curve and color the emotions of the heart. Only His Mother knew the tale of humiliation, suffering and sorrow that sweet Face told on Good Friday. It reflected no sign of anger or reproach; no flash of indignant lightning and no thunder-cloud of punishment darkened the brow. Nought could be seen there but kindness, pardon and love. But no eye of people, Priest or Roman read aught of affection in that sacred countenance when Pilate bade them, "Behold the Man."

The command of the Governor had scarcely died away among the multitude when the throng took up the wild cry of the Priests and hurled back into the teeth of Pilate their response to his suggestion; they cried out for the condemnation of our Saviour in that wild shout, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" For a moment the proud and disappointed Roman was surprised and stunned; his plans to keep his soul free from the guilt of judicial murder had failed. His schemes had been foiled. In weakness and sarcasm, Pilate said to them: "Take Him you and crucify Him, for I find no cause in Him."

Here is the testimony of the representative of Imperial Rome to Christ's innocence. The Jews in their response gave the reason for their insistence upon the death penalty for they answered him: "We have a law and according to that law He should die, because He made Himself the Son of God." This reply made a deep impression upon the Governor for "when Pilate, therefore, had heard this saying, he feared the more. And he entered into the hall again, and he said to Jesus: 'Whence art Thou?'" Surely here is a strong light cast upon the bearing of our Blessed Saviour during all the tortures and insults

to which He has been subjected, for even Pilate was filled with fear, and leading Him into the hall sought further converse with Him. The impression produced at the beginning must have been deepened on the mind of Pilate, as the long weary hours of anxiety and agony wore away. To the question put to Him by the Governor, our Lord gave no answer. Fear and cowardice had so blinded Pilate to his duty that no reply of our Blessed Saviour would have penetrated the darkness that enveloped him. And when Pilate in protest at our Lord's silence, claimed power to release or crucify Him, Jesus answered: "Thou shouldst not have any power against Me unless it were given thee from above. Therefore He that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin." "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release Him."

It is, however, too late. The spark of justice which begins to glow in his soul will soon die down and be extinguished. His efforts for the release of the Prisoner will soon relax under the opposition offered by the Jews. He had said boldly a few moments ago, "I find no cause in Him. I will let Him go." But he is too weak to make good his threat. Instead of acting as a Roman Governor wielding

the supreme power, who can say the word that would make the Victim a free Man, he timidly goes forth to parley with our Lord's astute, keen and stubborn adversaries.

The end is now in sight. The more insistent the Governor is in his endeavors to save Christ, the more determined are the Jews upon His death. Pilate will weaken, as the moments drag on and the opposition grows. Like a man struggling in the storm with the wild billows of the sea, his strength is fast ebbing away and at length, weak and exhausted, he gives up the struggle. He yields under the wild fierce cry, "If thou release this Man thou are not Cæsar's friend, for whoever maketh Himself a King speaketh against Cæsar." This is too much, more than he can stand. A courier tomorrow might hurriedly start on his way to Rome to report to his imperial master that, contrary to the urgent wishes of the Sanhedrin, the Governor had released a would-be King, a rival to the Roman crown and sceptre. This could never be. Such a danger no Governor in the provinces would dare run. Cæsar had the power of life and death. His favor meant position and success; his frown, political ruin and annihilation.

One more feeble effort, one more half-

hearted attempt to liberate his Victim and all is over. "Now when Pilate had heard these words he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in the place that is called 'Lithostrotos' and in Hebrew 'Gabbatha,' and it was the Parasceve of the Pasch, about the sixth hour, and he said to the Jews: 'Behold your King.' But they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!' Pilate saith to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief Priests answered, 'We have no king but Cæsar.' Then, therefore, he delivered Him to them to be crucified."

All is over, the chief Priests, the representatives of the nation, repudiate Christ and will not have Him reign over them. On the anniversary of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and the tyranny of Pharao they rejected their true Deliverer and King. The blood that marked their door-posts in Egypt freed them from the avenging Angel, but the blood trickling down the Face of Christ could not free them from their blasphemy and apostasy because they would not apply it to their souls. Moses said of old, "I call heaven and earth to witness this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose therefore life." On the Parasceve of

the Pasch at the sixth hour, the Jews chose death, when they cried out, "We have no king but Cæsar." Everyone who stains his soul with the guilt of sin, every man who refuses to walk in the way of God's Commandments, joins that throng outside the Prætorium of Pilate in the wild cry for blood, and shouting "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" chooses death.

THE VICTIM PREPARED

THE wild cry of the whole people, "We have no King but Cæsar" has scarcely died away before "Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required." The rejection of the Messias-King was complete and "Jesus was delivered up to their will."

The Roman Governor, who has upon his soul the blood of a Man he had repeatedly declared to be innocent, is scrupulous about the requirements of the law in passing this most unjust and uniquitous sentence. Vested in the robes of his office and wearing the insignia of his authority, accompanied by officers and soldiers, Pilate ascended the judgment-seat and proceeded to pronounce sentence. The formal condemnation was uttered in all probability after the manner of the Romans, and so the Governor, with eyes fixed upon the Victim of his injustice, unmoved by the pitiable condition in which his Prisoner was, in a ringing voice of authority, gave judgment: "You will die upon the cross; let the lictors prepare the instrument of torture and of justice."

In Rome an interval of two days intervened between the condemnation of a criminal and his execution. But no such respite was to be permitted to our Blessed Saviour. He was not to be alive on the festival day to mar the holy rites and sacred solemnities by His unwelcome and hated presence. The desire of His enemies for a speedy carrying out of the sentence was too eager and too keen to permit of any delay. When the lights would shine out that night in the Temple precincts in preparation for the solemnity of the Paschal Lamb, there must be no life in the Immaculate Lamb of God, the true Paschal Victim, whose slaying is able to do away with the sins of men if they will but apply that Blood to their sin-stained souls.

Once more, then, the Prisoner is disrobed and robed anew. How the glare of publicity must have sunk into the delicate, crushed soul of our Blessed Saviour! It must have been like the pouring of vinegar on a raw, exposed nerve; yet there was no murmur, no complaint. The purple cloak was torn from His sensitive and tortured shoulders. The wounds re-opened and once more the Precious Blood flowed down His limbs to the marble pavement of the Prætorium. Those sacred wounds,

"poor dumb mouths," were pleading so eloquently in their silence, but there were none in that vast throng to listen or hear. Arrayed now in His own garments and in the blood-stained seamless robe which His Mother's deft fingers had lovingly fashioned long ago in the quiet prayerful days at Nazareth, He stands meekly in the presence of His triumphant enemies ready to be led to execution.

Truly, as Holy Writ said, "Jesus he delivered up to their will." Why should they so maltreat Him? Why did they wish to wreak their vengeance upon Him? Even an unbelieving scoffing Roman Governor had asked them despairingly: "What evil hath He done?" He had declared that he found no cause in Him; had said that if they would force his hands to this wicked deed and pushed him to condemn, then he would be "innocent of the blood of this just Man." In all the world, throughout every age, from the beginning of time, there is no witness that could tell of a single soul that He had ever harmed. "The bruised reed He shall not break, the smoking flax He shall not quench," said the prophet as he peered down through the dark unknown time, and saw in vision the sinless Beloved of the Father.

On the other hand, how much good He had done! In the first place, He loved each one of us with an eternal love. Back in the everlasting years before the Angels sprang, in all their beauty, from the creative hand of God, the Eternal Son loved us with a love deeper than the sea and wider than the ocean. Then when the fulness of time had come, He came as a little Child in the silent midnight to the wind-swept cave of Bethlehem, to win our hearts. In all His up-growing years, at Nazareth, by the fascination of His beauty, and the humbler lessons of maturer years, He strove to draw our souls to Him in confidence and affection. His public life is summed up by the Gospel in these pregnant words: "He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil." He touched the eyes of the blind, and made them see; deaf ears that had never heard the music of a mother's voice, had opened by His power. At His command the scales fell from the festering limbs of the leper, and the health and vigor of other days returned. The sin-stained soul of Magdalene by His cleansing grace was made whiter than the snow of Libanus. No harsh sound of reproach came from His lips to the poor sinner for whose death men clam-

ored in the Temple porch. No disease of body, no anguish of spirit, no agony of soul, no bruise of heart, laid before Him, ever went unsoothed and unhealed.

How true then were His gentle reproaches and how truly He might have repeated them at the moment of His condemnation! These words had been uttered only a few weeks before within the very precincts of the Temple, when His life was sought: "Many good works have I shown to you. For which of these do you stone Me?" Yet even at this moment when He was "delivered to their will" and His enemies were rejoicing and congratulating each other upon the success of their efforts for the death of their Victim, our Lord was saying to their spirits: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as the hen doth gather her chickens, under her wing, and thou wouldst not!" In return they forced the hand of the Roman Governor to sign His death-warrant.

There is at times a temptation to wonder how after such ingratitude, as our Lord experienced, He could have continued at all to love us and His enemies. Yet, as He awaited

His cross, His Heart went out to the Priests and Ancients and people and to each one of us, with an enormous, unimaginable love, as ceaseless as the swell and fall of the never-resting tide on the ocean's shore.

He was condemned that Parasceve of the Pasch at the sixth hour, condemned by a cowardly Roman Governor, by an envious and vindictive priesthood, by the proud, jealous rulers of the nation, condemned by a blind and stubborn multitude, but St. Paul tells us "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." He might be condemned by the Roman Governor, but He is unwilling to condemn those who clamor for His death.

If we are "in Him" by faith in His teachings and the daily following of His example, or if, having fallen away from Him, we return as Peter did and repent, if we habitually strive to grow closer to Him in our temptations, our pains, our sorrow, then surely no words of condemnation upon us will ever fall from His lips. We are on trial. We may judge and condemn ourselves often; it will be well if we do; but as long as we cling to Him and make His sufferings a living memory in our lives and a power and an influence in our actions, then His sweet voice will never utter

against us the fatal sentence nor will He ever cast us off and banish us from His love and exile us from His home. For "there is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

"Jesus he delivered up to their will." They would not have had any power over Him unless He had been offered up because He willed. It was now their hour and the hour of the powers of darkness. Pilate had condemned Him and delivered Him up to their will, yet no word of complaint escaped His lips. A single whisper of omnipotence would have calmed that raging sea of hatred and stifled that infuriated mob, just as by His word He had calmed the waves of Galilee's sea and silenced the boisterous winds. Yet that word He would not speak as He stood alone and deserted and condemned on the Parasceve of the Pasch. The mob thought Him guilty, they had chosen Barabbas instead of Christ. They wanted Him sentenced to death, and now the sentence had been passed. "Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required."

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